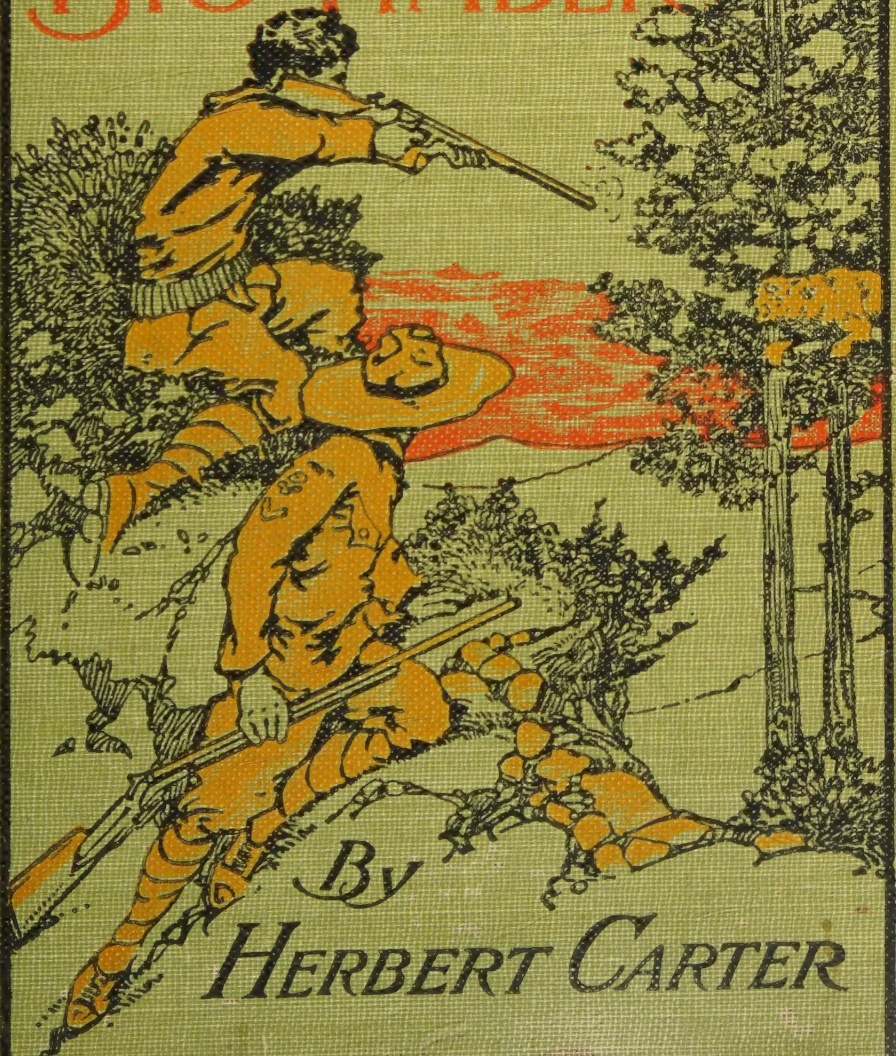
The Boy Scouts through the Big Timber



By Herbert Carter

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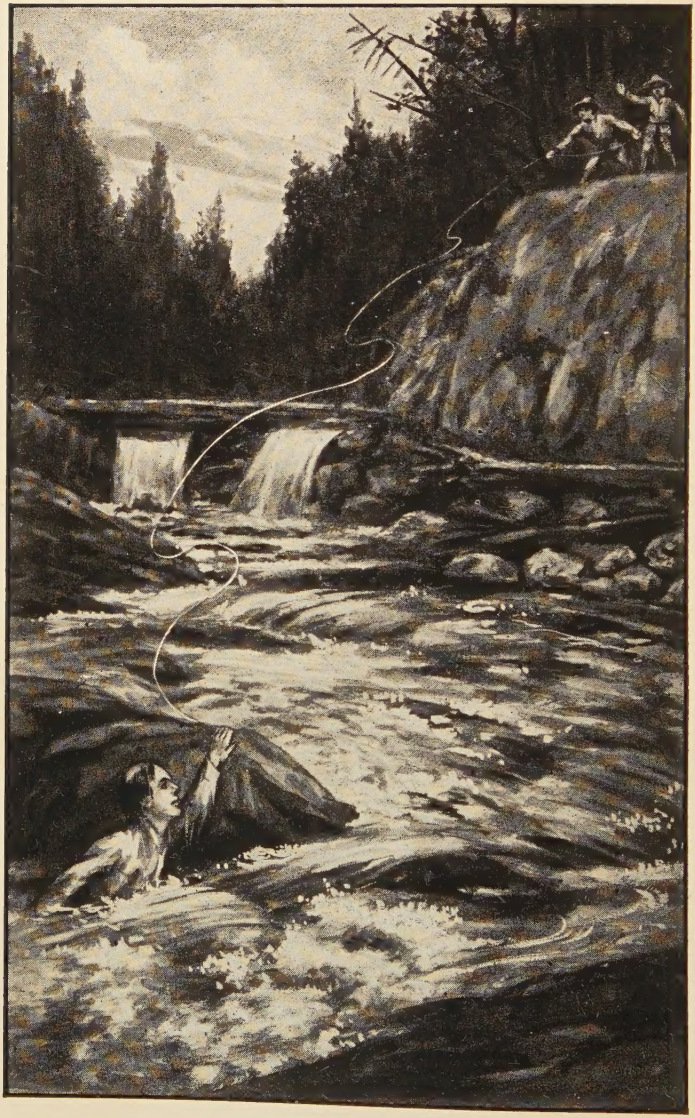

"Look out for it, Davy, and grab the noose when it comes near," shouted Thad.

The Boy Scouts Through the Big Timber

OR

The Search for the Lost Tenderfoot

By HERBERT CARTER

Author of "The Boy Scouts First Camp Fire," "The Boy Scouts in the Blue Ridge," "The Boy Scouts on the Trail," "The Boy Scouts in the Maine Woods," "The Boy Scouts in the Rockies"

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THE BOY SCOUTS THROUGH THE BIG TIMBER.

THE BOY SCOUTS
THROUGH THE BIG TIMBER

CHAPTER I.

THE CAMP.

"CALL the roll, Mr. Secretary," said the acting scoutmaster.

Of course this was a mere matter of form, because everybody knew that the entire membership of the Silver Fox Patrol, connected with the Cranford Troop of Boy Scouts, was present. But nevertheless Bob White gravely took out his little book, and made each boy answer to his name.

"Thad Brewster."

"Present," said the patrol leader, and assistant scoutmaster.

"Allan Hollister."

"Here," replied the second in command, a Maine boy, now living in Cranford, the New York town from whence these boys had journeyed to this far-

off region along the foothills of the great Rocky Mountains.

"Bumpus Hawtree."

"Ditto," sang out the fat youth, looking up with a wide grin; for he was about as good natured as he was ponderous.

"Giraffe Stedman."

"More ditto," answered the tall lad, with the long neck, and the quick movements, who was busying himself over the fire, being never so happy as when he could feed wood to the crackling blaze.

"Step Hen Bingham."

"On deck," replied the boy mentioned, who was busy with the supper arrangements.

"Davy Jones."

"O. K." came from the fellow who was walking on his hands at the moment, his waving feet being high in the air, where his head was supposed to appear; because Davy was a gymnast, and worked off his superfluous energy in doing all manner of queer stunts.

"Smithy."

"Present," and the speaker, a very natty chap, brushed off an imaginary insect from the sleeve of his coat; because it happened that Edmund Maurice Travers Smith, as he was known in his home circle, had been born with a horror for dirt; and it was taking his comrades a long time to bring him down

to the ordinary level of a happy-go-lucky, care-free boy like themselves.

"Robert White Quail."

And the last named being the secretary himself, he merely put a cross down, to indicate the fact of his being in the line of duty on that occasion.

"You neglected two other important members of the party!" called out Giraffe, who, of course had gained his peculiar name on account of the habit he had of often stretching that unusually long neck of his, until the boys likened him to an ostrich, and then a giraffe.

"Who are they?" demanded Bob White, scenting some sort of joke.

"Mike, and Molly, the honest, hard-working mules here that we have for pack animals," replied the tall scout, with a chuckle.

"Oh! I reckon, suh, they don't count on the roll call," remarked Bob White, who was a Southern boy, as his soft manner of speech, as well as certain phrases he often used, betrayed.

"Well," protested Giraffe, sturdily, "if you think now, that our pack mules ain't going to make an impression on our camping through the big timber, and the foothills of the Rockies, you've got another guess coming, let me tell you."

"Mike strikes me as particularly worthy of mention in the log book of the trip. He made a *distinct* impression on me, right in the start; and

left a black and blue record of it that hurts yet," with which remark, fat Bumpus—whose real name chanced to be Jasper Cornelius, began to ruefully rub a certain portion of his generous anatomy.

A general shout went up at this.

"Well, what could you expect, Bumpus?" demanded Davy Jones. "When Mike, out of the corner of his wicked eye, saw you stooping over that way, and offering such a wide target, the temptation was more than any respectable, well-educated mule could resist."

"Yes," put in Step Hen, who had divided his name in that queer fashion as a lad first attending school, and it had clung to him ever since; "you didn't know the strong points of pack mules, Bumpus, or you would never have gone so close to his heels."

"And," continued Davy, humorously, "you turned over in the air three times, before you struck that dirty pool of water. And that time, Bumpus, I own up you beat me fairly at gymnastics; for try as I will, so far I've only been able to do two turns backward in the air, myself."

Bumpus, being so good-natured, only chuckled, and kept on rubbing, as in imagination he saw the "cartwheels" he made in the air on that memorable occasion.

"Only thing I deeply regret," continued Davy, "was that I didn't have my camera focussed at the

time. That picture would sure have been the gem of our collection."

Bumpus presently sat himself down again, to watch those who were serving as cooks for that occasion, get supper ready.

And while it is preparing, with the fragrant odor of coffee in the air, making the hungry boys almost frantic with suspense, perhaps, for the benefit of the reader who has not made the acquaintance of these lively, wide-awake boys in earlier stories of this series, a brief explanation of who and what they were, may be deemed appropriate at this point.

The Silver Fox Patrol had been organized for quite some time now, and the boys who made up the membership had been fortunate enough to take two long trips, with the idea of adding to their knowledge of woodcraft, and such qualities as all good scouts are supposed to desire to possess.

The first one had been to the region of the Land of the sky. Robert Quail had come from the Blue Ridge, in North Carolina, and it was mostly through his influence and persuasion that the scouts had gone thence. And while there, they had met with many adventures that have been faithfully chronicled in their log book, and portrayed in a previous story.

Their next trip came in very fortunately. An epidemic breaking out in Cranford, the school

trustees closed the doors of the places of education until after the Christmas holidays. This gave the boys the chance they had long wanted to take a run up into Maine, and do a little camping, and hunting of big game; several of their number being very fond of handling a gun; and Allan having told them thrilling stories of the sport to be found in his native State after the law had been lifted.

And while enjoying themselves hugely, the scouts had had the good fortune to recover some stolen bonds and other valuables belonging to a bank that had been robbed. The reward offered for their restoration was paid over into their treasury, and was of such a size as to admit of their taking this long-desired journey into the mountain region of the Great Northwest, when vacation time came around.

During the balance of the winter, after their return from Maine, the story of the wonderfully good times they enjoyed there had so enthused other boys of Cranford, that a second full patrol, called the Eagle, had been organized; and a third addition to the troop, to be called the Gray Wolf, was in process of forming.

But of course none of these lads had any share in the reward that had come to the members of the first patrol; so that accounted for their not being present on his occasion.

Bumpus was a musician, and had a fine mellow

voice, which he often used to entertain his mates while sitting around the roaring camp-fire. He could play on any instrument; indeed, with merely his doubled-up hands, and his melodious voice, he often imitated various calls on the bugle. And of course he had been elected as bugler to the troop, though on the present occasion they had induced him to leave his instrument at home, not thinking a hunting camp the place for such noisy demonstrations.

The boys carried guns of various sorts, though until lately Bumpus had never bothered himself about such a thing. But while in Maine the fever seized him, and he had purchased a big ten-bore Marlin double-barreled shotgun; because he always admired the twelve gauge of the same make which Thad owned.

Step Hen had a little beauty of a thirty-thirty six-shot repeating rifle, that had been given to him by his father on a recent birthday. Thad sometimes borrowed it, and could use the same with considerable skill. It carried those soft-nosed bullets that mushroom when striking, and thus do all the work of a ball several times the size. If big game must be killed, the quicker the thing is over with the better. Besides, that little fire-arm was "just as light as a feather," as Step Hen always declared, when disputing with Giraffe, who carried the large rifle owned by his respected dad, also fond of the woods and game.

Davy managed to get along with a shotgun, while Allan had a rifle. Smithy and Bob White had brought no weapons along, deeming the number on hand amply sufficient to clean out most of the wild beasts inhabiting the Rocky Mountain region. In fact, Smithy had never shot a gun in his life, and was timid about trying; but on the other hand Bob was quite used to working with a good retriever in the grain fields, where the bird he was named after fattened, away down in the Old Tarheel State.

Davy seemed to be unusually full of animal spirits on this occasion. He just could not keep quiet, but kept up his tumbling, and standing on his head, even though no one paid much attention to what wonderful stunts the athletic lad was carrying on.

Close by them ran a noisy stream. It came out from the foothills of the great uplifts near by, and went brawling on its way. Indeed, it made so much music that the scouts had to call out to each other at times; but somehow the prospect of passing a night near such a rollicking stream pleased them all. Besides, they were sure it must contain trout, and several promised to get up at break of day to try for the speckled beauties, so that they might have a mess for breakfast, before continuing on their way.

"Say, has anybody seen my sweater around?"

called out Step Hen, who was busily engaged looking over the contents of his pack, having turned over the control of the cooking meal to Allan and Thad. "I'm just sure I stowed it away in this knapsack I carry, but it ain't there now. I'm the unluckiest feller you ever did see, about having my things taken. Everybody just thinks they're general property, and grabs 'em up. Please hand it over, whoever's got it. I might want it to-night, if it gets cool."

Step Hen was careless. He had a long-standing habit of never knowing where he put his things, and hence, when he missed some object, loud were his wails about being pursued by a "little evil genius," that was taking the greatest delight in misplacing his possessions. Even when one of the other scouts, taking pity on Step Hen, would show him where he had himself left the article, he would pass it off as easily as a duck shakes the water from its back.

The tents had been raised, and everything looked cozy and comfortable. Several of the scouts lay around, being footsore and weary; only that never-tired Davy was still exercising himself in all sorts of ways. In due time he would work off his superfluous energy, and behave. They were so accustomed to seeing Davy hang by his toes from the high limb of a tree, or doing some similar act better fitted for the circus than a camp of Boy Scouts, that little attention was ordinarily paid to his actions.

It came as a shock, then, when all of a sudden Thad started up with a shout, and started on a run toward the edge of the high river bank, where one could look down on the tumbling waters of the churning yeasty rapids.

"Hurry, boys!" the scoutmaster was calling at the top of his voice, as he covered the dozen yards separating the camp from the edge of the little bluff; "Davy went too near the edge, and took a header right over into the river!"

Every one of the other six lads hurried as fast as possible to join their leader on the brink of the bluff; and when they reached there, they saw a sight that for the moment seemed to freeze the very blood in their veins.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT FRIGHTENED THE PACK MULES.

"HOLD on to the rock, Davy! We'll get you out!" whooped Giraffe, greatly excited, so that Thad, believing the tall scout meditated jumping after the boy who was already at the mercy of that swift current, dropped a restraining hand on his arm.

"He must a hit his head when he fell; you c'n see he looks dazed!" cried Bumpus.

"Just what he did, I reckon!" added Bob White, as he clenched his hands, and stared at the figure out in the midst of that rushing, boiling water.

Davy looked far from nimble just then. He was clinging desperately to a slippery moss-covered rock that just projected above the foamy water. If he allowed his grip to slacken he would be instantly carried into a pocket that had all the appearance of a whirlpool; and once lost in that gap, where the water whirled around and around. Davy might never come out alive again.

Under ordinary conditions the agile lad might have had a fair chance to work out his own salvation, for he was a good swimmer; but just as Bumpus said, possibly he had struck his head when falling, and this dazed him. He could only hang on there, and look appealingly toward his comrades, high up on the bank.

Thad saw immediately that the task of rescuing their comrade would prove to be not a little one, even though Davy could hold on for a few minutes longer, which was uncertain, since the current was very strong, and seemed to drag at him with a dozen eager hands.

"A rope! We must have a rope!" he cried.

"Where's Bumpus? Take this rope!" came from Giraffe.

"That's so; here, get your coat off, Bumpus, in a big hurry!" exclaimed Thad, whirling upon the fat boy, who was even then starting to obey.

Strange to say, as soon as he had undone his loose coat, one of the reasons for his apparent great size through the body became apparent. Bumpus had a small but stout clothes-line wound around his body many times.

While up in Maine he had taken a fancy for

having a rope close to his hand. On many occasions he had seen the great value of such a thing; and it had by degrees become almost a mania with Bumpus; who secured just such a rope as he thought best adapted for the purpose, and carefully wound it around his body every morning.

And as the possession of such a thing caused the scoffing scouts to call it a lariat, of course Bumpus was privately and publicly doing his level best to throw the rope, as he had once seen some cowboys connected with a traveling circus do; but with rather poor success thus far, for his build rather unfitted him for doing such strenuous work.

Bumpus was so clumsy about most things that it could not be expected that on the present occasion, when there was so much need of haste he could satisfy the nervous demands of his campmates.

He started to unwind the rope, but twice the end fell from his shaking fingers, when he heard Giraffe call out that Davy seemed to be about to let go his hold.

Unable to stand such dilly-dallying tactics, Allan and Giraffe presently took hold of the fat boy, and

began to whirl him around as though he were a teetotum, while Thad pulled at the rope.

"Here, quit that!" roared Bumpus, throwing out his hands in an effort to catch hold of something, for he was rapidly growing very dizzy under this treatment; "what d'ye think I am, a top that wants spinning? Hi! ketch me somebody, I'm going to tumble over!" and as the last remnant of the clothes-line slipped from his rotating form, the fat scout did reel around like a drunken man, though quickly recovering from the dizzy sensation.

Meanwhile Thad was busy. Fortunately Bumpus always kept a nice noose at the end of the rope, with a running knot. Thad knew this, for he had many a time thrown the lariat with considerable skill, when showing the owner just how it should be done.

Hastily he gathered the coils of rope in his hand, and rushed again to the edge of the little bluff looking out on the rapids.

He drew a breath of relief when he saw that the unfortunate gymnast was still there, clinging desperately to that slippery rock, and yet apparently well-nigh exhausted.

"Look out for it, Davy, and grab the noose when it comes near! Here goes!"

With that the scoutmaster gave the rope several whirls about his head, and then launched it forward. The others watched the result, with hearts that seemed to actually stand still with suspense.

"Missed him!" cried Giraffe, in despair, as the rope struck the surface of the swift water about five feet or more above the imperiled scout.

"Thad wanted to send it there; see!" exclaimed Allan.

Just as the one who had thrown the rope expected, the noose was instantly seized by the foaming waters, and swept downward, straight at the clinging boy. Although Davy may have been partly dazed, he had known enough to hang on with might and main. And right then and there he seemed to understand what Thad meant to do; for as the rope was borne up against the partly submerged rock to which he clung, the boy made a quick snatch at it.

"He lost it!" shrieked Bumpus, who had recovered enough now to crawl near the edge in order to see what was going on; though not daring

to trust his weight too near the brink, lest the earth crumble under him, and let him drop into the rapids where Davy was already fighting for his life.

"Not much he did!" echoed Giraffe; "he's got it all right! Good boy, Davy! Slip it under your arms, and we'll yank you out in a jiffy! That's the ticket! Hurrah!"

Davy seemed to understand what he must do. It was not enough that he gripped the noose at the end of the saving rope; for once in the power of the tossing current of the whirlpool he might lose his hold.

And so he managed to put his arm right through, after which he held on with might and main with that hand while he got the second one through the loop.

It was the last straw that broke the camel's back; Davy was so completely exhausted by this effort that he just had to let go, and trust to his comrades to do the rest.

Thad began to pull with all his strength, and others laid hold on the line, to add their mite to the work of rescue. Fortunately Bumpus had selected a splendid braided window-sash cord when he picked out his rope, capable of standing an

enormous strain; and it held, despite the drag of the savage whirlpool, and the rush of the rapids.

Through the white foaming waters Davy was dragged in great style. One of them managed to get down the little bluff, and helped the almost drowned scout to clamber up. But hardly had Davy reached the camp than he fell in a faint, utterly exhausted. Excitement had more or less to do with it, perhaps fright as well; for he had really been facing death during those few minutes when he held on with such splendid grit.

Thad soon brought him to; and upon examining the boy's head he did discover a pretty good-sized lump, showing that what they suspected must have taken place; and that Davy had struck against a rock in falling.

Davy was unusually quiet for the rest of the afternoon, and pretty serious for one of his animal spirits. He realized that he had had a close call; and never more would he make fun of poor Bumpus for such a silly fad as carrying a rope around with him wherever he went. Only for that Davy might have had a much more serious time of it, even if he were rescued at all.

They were having an early supper for many

reasons. The tramp had been rather tiresome on this day; and besides, that location on the side of the noisy mountain stream had taken their fancy.

When the meal was ready Bumpus made a bugle of his hands, and blew the "assembly" in fairly good style. But none of the hungry scouts waited for him to get through; for they were hard at it as soon as he started. Indeed, Bumpus himself cut his "call" short, as he saw the tremendous inroads being made on the visible supply of food; and hastened to take his place, fearful lest he be left mourning, with a scant ration.

Had Davy been half drowned by his submersion in the water, the scoutmaster knew just what to do in order to restore him. He would have placed the boy on his stomach, with his arms elevated; and while two of the others worked these back and forth like pump handles, Thad would have knelt astride Davy, pressing regularly downward with his hands or knees; the idea being to produce an artificial respiration, and encourage the heart to take up its suspended functions.

It still lacked half an hour of sunset when they finished supper; and Bob White was even thinking of getting out some fishing tackle, in order to see

if he could coax a few trout from the stream, at the foot of the rapids below.

The two mules, Mike and Molly, had been staked out at the end of their ropes, and were cropping the green grass that grew abundantly near by.

"Don't things look just fine and dandy around here, though?" remarked Step Hen, as they lay there, feeling too full of supper to do anything.

"Yes; and so far we haven't missed those two guides who gave us the cold shake," Giraffe added. "One of 'em had to go and get sick; and the other broke his contract, and went off with those two Eastern sportsmen who came out here to shoot mountain sheep, just like they do chamois over in Switzerland. But we're going to get on all right without 'em; though I hope we manage to run across that Toby Smathers they told us about, and who's up here somewhere on his own hook doin' something, nobody seemed to know just what."

"Yes," remarked Thad, "they told us he was just the right kind of a guide to get. He's been through the whole mill—lumber-jack, trapper, hunter, timber cruiser; and forest ranger employed to look out for fires, and watch some of those thieves of timber pirates sent in here by the big

lumber concerns to steal millions of millions of feet of valuable lumber every winter."

"Hello! now Mike's gone and caught it!" cried Giraffe."

This caused all of them to sit up, and take notice that one of the mules was dancing at a lively clip at the end of his rope. He would stand up on his hind legs, and strain at his stake; then turning, he would kick as far as he could; and carry on in a most remarkable manner.

"What in the dickens ails the beast?" asked Step Hen. "Has a bumble bee stung him on the nose?"

"Why, don't you see, it's catching," retorted Giraffe, grinning. "He saw the way Davy here was walking around on his hands, with his feet in the air; and Mike wants us to see if he can do better than that. I reckon he'll stand on one foot after a bit, and show Davy stunts he dassent try to follow."

"Now, there goes Molly trying the same dodge," shouted Bumpus.

"Well, I declare, if that don't beat the Dutch!" ejaculated Giraffe. "As sure as I live, fellers, they mean to make it a double harness affair, a team of educated mule gymnasts. Go it, Mike! Hey, show us what you can do, Molly! I'm believing she c'n

beat her pardner all hollow. Look at that jump, would you? Say, they must a been eating some of that loco weed we heard about, fellers!"

"They're frightened, that's what!" exclaimed Thad, as he started to cast his eyes around in search of any unusual object, but failing to discover such; from which fact he judged that the mules depended on their sense of smell to tell them there was danger near by.

"Frightened; what at?" echoed Davy Jones.

"I don't know; but if ever I saw a scared mule, that Mike is one," Thad went on.

"Look at him jerk, would you?" cried Giraffe. "Unless that stake gives way soon, he'll sure break his old stubborn neck. Whoa! there, you silly; nothing's going to hurt you. Wow! there he goes awhoopin', Thad! The stake did give way, before he dislocated his spine. And there's Molly bound to follow after him, whoop! see her tear, would you?"

"She's broke away too, and is trailing the rope after her!" cried Step Hen.

"And now, won't we just have a dandy old time hunting our pack mules again; unless by some accident that stake and rope get caught in the rocks,

and holds 'em up; which I'm hoping will be the case," remarked Giraffe, looking blankly after the two disappearing animals, that, when last seen, were still acting in the most remarkable manner, and giving every evidence of a severe fright.

"Now, what d'ye suppose, scared the fools that way?" demanded Bob White.

"P'raps they just felt frisky, and wanted to show us their heels. I told you they'd be mad, if you didn't include them on the roll call," Giraffe remarked; though in truth, he was feeling anything but funny just then, as he contemplated the possibility of their being stranded away out there under the shadow of the great Rockies, without a single pack animal to "tote" their camp luggage either way.

"Look around, and see if you can spy anything moving," advised the scoutmaster, making use of his own sharp eyes at the same moment.

Immediately Bumpus called out:

"What's that lumbering along over yonder, Thad? Looks to me like an old, cinnamon-colored cow."

Thad took one look.

"You're away off there, Bumpus," he remarked,

in a thrilling tone; "because those two wise mules knew what was coming. That is anything but a cow or even a bull. It's a bear!"

"A bear!" almost shrieked Bumpus, making a dive for the nearest tent, in which lay his nice ten-bore Marlin, loaded with buckshot shells.

"Yes," Thad went on, "and a great big grizzly bear at that. Let's hope he'll give us the go-by, and walk on about his own business!"

CHAPTER III.

WHEN THE FOXES TOOK TO THE TREES.

"BANG!"

"Hold on there, Bumpus, you're crazy!" shouted Thad.

"Bang!" went the other barrel of the new ten-bore gun, with which the fat scout was determined he would sooner or later get a bear.

"Oh! he knocked him over!" shrieked Step Hen, who had managed in some mysterious way to get possession of his own gun, and was visibly disappointed because it began to look as though he could not make use of it.

"Bumpus has killed a grizzly!" shouted Giraffe; and then, quick on the heels of this exultant cry he added: "no he ain't, either! Look at him gettin' up on all fours again! Now he's sighted us, fellers! Here he comes, licketty-split! A tree for mine! They told us grizzlies couldn't climb trees, you know."

Giraffe was as good as his word. He seemed to fairly fly over to the nearest tree, and the way those supple long legs wrapped around the slender trunk was a sight worth seeing.

A panic broke out among the rest, especially when Thad shouted:

"Get up a tree, everybody! Quick, now, he's coming right along!"

Now, Step Hen had his rifle, and knew that it could be depended on to do its work, provided the marksman himself was there with the good aim. Step Hen did not have full confidence in his ability to plant a bullet where it would do the most execution. Besides, the sight of that savage monster lumbering along, and looking so very fierce, gave poor Step Hen an attack of the "rattles."

When he heard the scoutmaster call out for every one to hunt a tree, Step Hen felt that he must be included in that order. If all the others climbed to safety, it would be the height of folly for him to remain below.

And not wanting to play the part of Casibianca, the boy who "stood on the burning deck, whence all but him had fled," Step Hen, dropping his gun

as he ran, made for a tree that seemed to offer all the advantages of home.

Just ahead of him was Bumpus, gripping a limb with a desperation born of despair, and struggling furiously to get one of his fat legs entwined above, when he might hope to pull himself up.

Step Hen had no trouble in mounting on his side of the tree.

"Give Bumpus a hand, Step Hen!" shouted the scoutmaster, already settled in a nest of his choosing.

As one scout is expected to help another whenever the chance arises, doubtless Step Hen would have rendered this "first aid to the clumsy" even though Thad had not seen fit to call out.

There was really need of haste. The wounded bear was perilously near, and seemed to be heading straight for the tree where Bumpus was, unable, in his excitement and fright to draw his body up on the limb to which he clung.

His fat face was white, and his eyes seemed almost ready to pop out of his head, as Step Hen, bending down, caught hold of his coat collar. It looked as though the angry bear just knew which

of these campers had inflicted this pain upon him, and was bent upon revenge.

But Step Hen was strong, moreover, the necessity of moving the unwieldy body of Bumpus was great. Exerting himself as the fat scout commenced to strain again, Step Hen managed to get Bumpus up alongside him.

Even then there was more or less danger that the grizzly might stand erect on his hind legs, and be able to claw them, so the boys hastened to put more distance between their precious bodies and the furious beast.

When the bear found that he could not reach any of the scouts, he spent some little time rolling from one tree to another, and looking up at the boys in the branches and sending forth loud growls.

"Scat! get out!" shouted Giraffe. "Say, he's a goin' to try and climb up my thin tree. Here, quit that, you old scamp! Look what he's doin', Thad! Wow! he wants to shake me down like a big persimmon."

The bear did actually shake the slender tree to and fro, by exerting his tremendous strength. Giraffe had a few anxious minutes. He had to hold on with all his might to keep from being dislodged.

And then again, there was always a chance that the furious grizzly might actually snap the tree off.

After a short time the animal seemed to tire of this sport. Greatly to the relief of Giraffe he ambled away.

"Good-bye, old feller! Come again when you can't stay so long!" cried Giraffe, whose courage returned when he realized that his safety was assured.

But the bear did not have the remotest idea of abandoning his game.

"He smells our grub, that's what!" called out Bumpus. "See him sniffing, would you? And there he goes, right at our stock of things. Oh! what if he gobbles it all up, whatever will we do, stranded away up here?"

"We've got to do something, boys, to chase him off," declared Allan.

"If I had some powder up here, I'd show him," declared Giraffe.

"What would you do?" demanded Smithy, who for once had not waited to pick out a clean tree, when he started to "elevate."

"Why, I'd wet some powder, and make those sputtering 'devils' you remember I used to carry

around with me. Then I'd get the old bear right under, put a match to a bunch of the powder, and when it took to sending out sparks to beat the band, I'd drop it on his back. Wow! but take my word for it, boys, he'd make tracks out of this in a cloud of smoke."

"Well, suh, why don't you do that, and help us out of a bad scrape?" demanded Bob White, whose hot Southern blood fairly boiled at the ridiculous idea of eight wide-awake scouts being made prisoners, by just one old bear.

"For several reasons," replied Giraffe, calmly. "In the first place I don't happen to possess a single match, even if I had the powder, which is not the case. And then again, I want to see how our sagacious and resourceful scoutmaster works his little game."

This caused all the others to turn their attention toward Thad. For the first time they discovered that he was lowering a long piece of cord, with an open loop a few inches in diameter at the end.

"Oh! I know what he's hoping to do," sang out Bumpus. "He wants to fish up Step Hen's gun, that lies just below him, where Step Hen dropped it."

"That's the stuff!" declared Davy Jones, excitedly, as he watched the operation.

"But look at the bear, fellers!" cried Giraffe. "He's right at it now, chawin' up our grub as if he could store away the lot of it. Guess he's forgot all about us."

"Don't you believe it," declared Allan. "Watch me prove it."

With that he made as if to descend his tree. No sooner had his swinging legs attracted the attention of the bear, than uttering savage growls he abandoned his feast, and came hurriedly over, to look up at Allan with those cruel little eyes, as if inviting him to just try it.

So Thad had to suspend operations until Bruin, overtaken by a desire to once more revel in the camp-stores, shuffled back again to the neighborhood of the twin tents.

"Don't coax him over here again, please, Allan," remarked the scoutmaster, who was now busily engaged "fishing" with that looped cord, trying to drop the noose over the end of the little rifle, which, by a rare chance, was raised a few inches from the ground.

The other scouts were all watching his labor, being deeply interested in the result.

"Now you've got a bite, Thad!" called out Giraffe.

"Give it to him, Thad!" advised Step Hen.

But the fisherman was too cautious to risk so much. He wanted to slip the noose a little further along, before he made a final jerk, in order to try and tighten it.

"He's got his eye on you, Thad!" warned Smithy, whose tree happened to be better located for observation than any of the other ones appropriated by his comrades.

"Yes, and there he's coming over to see what you mean by that string hanging down," asserted Giraffe.

"Somebody draw his attention!" called out Thad. "Make him think you're meaning to drop down. It will give me the chance I need to finish my job."

"Yes, throw Bumpus down, Step Hen!" called out Giraffe. "He was the cause of all this trouble, and he ought to sacrifice himself now, in order to create a diversion."

"Keep away from me! Don't you dare touch

me, Step Hen! I'll pull you down along with me, if you try to do that," cried Bumpus, really alarmed.

But Allan caught the idea Thad advanced. Besides, it just happened that he was well situated for carrying it out. By going through some extravagant motions, as though about to descend, he caught the attention of the bear, which immediately shuffled over to his tree, and looked up expectantly.

Meanwhile Thad was not idle.

He saw what he had to do in order to make a sure thing of his work. Moving to one side a little, as the nature of his hold in the branches of the tree permitted, he jerked at his line until the loop actually closed tightly on the barrel of Step Hen's rifle. After that it should not be a difficult task to pull the weapon up.

"Quick! Thad, he's coming!" shouted the excited Giraffe.

In spite of all Allan's cutting-up the bear seemed to think that he had better be paying more attention to what was going on elsewhere.

Thad had raised the gun from the ground. It was slowly ascending through space, and turning around as it came.

The grizzly hurried underneath, while Thad

hastened to pass the cord through his fingers and when the wise old bear, seeming to understand the case, reared up to strike at the dangling rifle, he just managed to give it a tap that started it to spinning around at a lively clip.

"Oh!" gasped Giraffe, under the belief that all was lost.

But Thad had made one last drag, and even as the other uttered that exclamation the scoutmaster snatched the gun out of the air; for with that very last pull, the noose seemed to have slipped.

"Hurrah! Thad wins!" burst out from Step Hen.

"Good-bye, old Charlie!" mocked Bumpus. "Better skip out while there is time, if you know what's good for you."

But the bear did not seem to be that wise. He remained there, winking those wicked little eyes up at Thad, as if daring him to do his worst.

"Give it to him, Thad!" begged Giraffe, so impatient that he could hardly understand why the more careful boy should wait.

But although Thad had never up to now encountered a wild grizzly, he had heard and read a great deal about them. And thus he knew that

at times such an animal can be shot full of bullets, so to speak, without killing him, so tenacious of life is the grizzly bear of the Rocky Mountains.

On this account, therefore, Thad wished to make all the capital possible out of the six bullets that were contained in Step Hen's gun.

Waiting until a good opportunity presented itself, he took a quick aim, and then pulled the trigger. With the report there came a tremendous roar, so savage, so full of pent-up animal rage, that Bumpus immediately proceeded to climb up to a still higher limb of the tree in which he had found shelter.

"He's down! No, he's up again! Give him another, Thad! Oh! don't I wish I had my Old Reliable here, though," cried Giraffe.

Thad was awake to the necessity for prompt action. The bear, even though desperately wounded, was still full of fight. And there could be no telling what the maddened animal might not attempt, if given time.

Thad taking careful aim fired again.

He really felt an admiration for the hard-fighting grizzly, such as all hunters worthy of the name ex-

perience toward the four-footed enemy that puts up a game battle for its life.

There were four more bullets in the repeating rifle, and Thad had to make use of them all before he could really feel he had caused the last vital spark to flee from its abiding-place in the body of the shaggy monster.

But after the sixth and last shot had been fired, there was silence on the part of the terror of the mountain gulches. The grizzly's last convulsive movement had taken place. No longer would his savage roar, echoing from cliff to cliff, cause all other wild animals to flee.

"Hurrah!" shouted Giraffe, as he dropped to the ground.

"Is he surely dead?" asked Smithy, from his perch aloft.

For answer the reckless Giraffe ran up, and placed a foot on the motionless body of the bear.

CHAPTER IV.

BUMPUS TAKES A CHANCE.

"EVERYBODY'S getting bears but me," Bumpus was saying on the following day, when, a new camp having been selected, further removed from the noise of the rapids, the boys decided to stay over for a little while, and try their luck hunting through the big timber lands around them.

The two runaway pack mules had been recovered. Just as the boys expected, the trailing stakes had become caught fast in the rocks that lay up the stream, and in which direction the panic-stricken pack animals had gone. Both were found before darkness set in, and escorted back in triumph to the camp.

The boys had also discovered that hungry trout lay in schools below the foaming rapids, just anxious to grace the frying-pan of the scouts. And the savory mess they had secured for breakfast that

morning was one of the reasons why, upon putting the question to a vote, it was decided to stay over a while.

And after they had located the new camp, with the tents erected, and things looking fairly comfortable, the complaining voice of Bumpus was heard in the land, as he rubbed diligently at the shining barrels of his Marlin with an oiled rag.

"Well, you had your chance, didn't you?" demanded Step Hen, with a wink and a nod in the direction of Thad, who had paused to listen, while stretching the great skin of the grizzly on a big frame, to start drying.

"I s'pose I did; but he was too far away for my buckshot to bring him down," declared Bumpus; "but I hit him, didn't I, Thad?"

"In eight different places by actual count," replied the other. "Altogether this pelt is shot so full of holes it won't make the finest rug going; but whenever we look at it on the floor of our armory we'll all remember the queer kind of fruit the trees out here bear."

"There is Giraffe, now," went on Bumpus, still hugging his grievance to his heart; "he got a black bear when we were up in Maine, but I call that just

a snap. The old thief was astealin' honey from the tree we cut down, when Giraffe, he just plunked him. Why, my dandy gun would have knocked that bear over at such close range, the easiest ever."

"I guess it would, Bumpus," said Thad, consolingly, "and sometime, perhaps you'll have your chance. We all hope you will, anyhow."

"I'm going to see to it that I do," grumbled the fat scout; and from his manner one would be apt to think that really life was becoming very tame, and hardly worth having, unless he might find his one great wish gratified.

Bumpus really felt his failure of the preceding night very keenly. It was not often that any of the boys had seen him so sober and sour.

He felt as though a cruel fate had taken pleasure in cheating him out of honors he should have claimed. That ought to have been *his* bear, by right of first discovery; and also because he had fired both barrels of his Marlin at the beast, and actually knocked him over.

The trouble was, old Charlie did not know enough to stay down; but had persisted in giving them further trouble, until Thad engineered that clever

scheme for getting possession of a gun, when immediately the game was up.

Had Thad ever dreamed of what a tenacious hold this newly-acquired desire to shine as a mighty Nimrod, had taken upon the mind of Bumpus, he would certainly have been more careful about leaving the tenderfoot to his own devices.

The morning was still young when Giraffe proposed that they make up a party, to take a look around.

"Who knows but what we might run across a deer; or one of those Rocky Mountain big-horn sheep?" he added, as a clincher to his argument.

"That sounds good to me," declared Step Hen.

"I'll go along to help tote your game," remarked Bob White.

"And I'm in the ring," remarked Step Hen. "Why, my mouth's just watering for some prime mutton chops."

Thad smiled. He knew that if ever they did secure a big-horn, the flesh of that high jumping animal would probably be as tough as leather, unless fortunately they chanced upon a young one.

It was finally arranged that besides Thad and

Allan, Step Hen, Giraffe and Bob White should make up the hunting party.

This would leave three in camp—Smithy who had no gun, Davy Jones, whose head still felt sore from the effect of his accident on the previous afternoon; and the despondent Bumpus, who was acting very strangely, for one of his cheery disposition.

No one dreamed that any trouble could come upon the camp while part of the scouts were away. Two of those who remained owned guns, though at the last moment Davy Jones forced Bob White to carry his "pump" shot gun. But then, what was there to fear? If the mate of the slain grizzly came around, looking for the absent one, the boys had been instructed to take to the trees; and Thad had even gone to the trouble of picking out the best fortress available in this line, one that even the clumsy Bumpus could readily climb.

"Think you could shin up that tree, in case the other old Mountain Charlie came prowling around?" Thad asked Bumpus.

"Oh! I guess I could," replied the other, rather indifferently, Thad thought.

"Tell you what, Bumpus," called out Step Hen, "if I was you I'd fix it so's to have my ammunition

up in that tree. Then, you see, if he sat down at the butt here, to wait till you got ripe and dropped, why, you could just keep banging away till you loaded him so full of little bullets he couldn't get up off the ground. Great stunt, ain't it boys?"

The others readily declared that it was making things easy for Bumpus. They were even kind enough to express a wish that another bear *would* take a notion to come around, just to please Bumpus, for it pained them exceedingly to see him looking so miserable.

But the fat boy did not grow at all enthusiastic over Step Hen's proposal. He just watched all the preparations being made for the hunt; and sitting there on the log, kept polishing his gun, although it certainly showed no speck of rust or grime.

Presently all of them were ready to start.

"It would be nice now," said Thad, before departing, "if some of you camp-keepers gave those trout another try. We may not get a shot at a deer all the time we're gone; and if we fail on fresh meat, another mess of trout would taste pretty fine."

"I should say they would, whether we strike game or not," declared Giraffe.

"Haven't tasted anything so good since we were up in Maine last fall, and had just one mess before the trout season closed," Allan observed.

"I'll try and accommodate you as far as I'm able," Smithy agreed.

"Same here," echoed Davy Jones.

But as for Bumpus, good-natured, jolly Bumpus, he seemed to have lost his tongue, for he failed to add his promise to that of the other two scouts.

Thad looked at him as he turned away. He had never dreamed that the fat scout would take anything so much to heart. Bumpus was not cut out for a good hunter, either by instinct or bodily favor. Some of his enemies in Cranford, like Brose Griffin and Eli Bangs, were wont to say that Bumpus was not only ponderous of body, but "fat-witted" as well, by which they probably meant his mind was slow to act.

Still, there have been successful fat hunters. Bumpus knew, for he had made it a point to investigate in every way possible, and he was resolved that he would shine as a successful Nimrod, despite the disadvantages under which he labored. So

much the more credit to him when he finally proved his right to boast that proud title.

After the five hunters went away, Smithy found some bait, and wandered down to the base of the rapids to fish. The gentle art of angling was more in the line of the dude of the patrol than tramping through the big timber after elusive game.

Here Davy Jones presently joined him, saying that Bumpus had urged him to add a second rod and line to that Smithy already had out.

"Couldn't get him to try it, though," said Davy. "Told me he was no fisherman, and nearly always fell in, he was that clumsy. And between us, Smithy, that's pretty near the truth."

"Well, I can remember several occasions when Bumpus made a splash that he didn't calculate on," remarked Smithy, who was usually just as careful of his language as he was of his clothes, and no one could ever remember ever hearing him utter any slang phrase.

Meanwhile the five hunters had gone off in high spirits. The day was glorious, and a whole month of this sort of thing stared them in the face. That was enough to make any bunch of boys happy, es-

pecially when they cared as much for the Great Outdoors as Thad and his chums did.

Allan was a born hunter. What he did not know about stalking game and all such things that a successful hunter must be up in, the boys had not as yet learned.

He had noted the passing clouds, and observed the direction in which the prevailing wind blew. It was of considerable moment for the success of their fresh meat hunt, that they go *up* the breeze. In this way they would avoid having their presence in the timber made known in advance to the wary game, through the medium of the wonderful sense of smell which most animals possess.

The five scouts spread out at times in the shape of a fan, so as to cover as much ground as possible.

Again they would come together for a little consultation, when they could compare notes; and those who were not very much experienced in still hunting, pick up more or less valuable pointers.

Noon came, but as yet they had not met with any success. Around them the tall trees grew thickly, and some of them had trunks of such girth that the scouts easily understood why this region was always referred to as the "big timber."

As they ascended higher up the slopes of the foothills that bordered the Rockies, they would find the trees growing smaller all the while, until far up the heights the stunted mesquite or the dwarfed cedar alone remained.

Not at all dismayed, after they had refreshed themselves with the lunch brought for that purpose, the young hunters again started out.

The wind had veered somewhat, and with this fresh start they changed their own course, so as to keep it coming toward them. Thad was just as well pleased, for this new direction would serve to keep them within a few miles of camp; and in case they did manage to secure meat, they would not have so far to transport it.

Still the time kept slipping away, and the sun could hardly have been more than two hours above the western horizon when suddenly a buck was started. Every one was so eager to get in a shot, that a regular volley rang out immediately.

There was positively no chance for the poor deer. He went down in a heap, and was so near dead when he reached the ground that he did not even give a last expiring kick.

Of course the boys were delighted, especially

when Allan declared their united quarry was a nice young buck, and that his flesh ought by all rights be tender.

Using the greatest dispatch the deer was soon cut up. And when the various packages of meat had been judiciously distributed, the five scouts started on their return to camp.

Thanks to the knowledge of woodcraft possessed by Allan and Thad, they managed to make the camp on a line as straight as an arrow, almost. Indeed, Thad declared that a bee laden with honey, could make no more direct drive for the hive than Allan had in leading them toward the region of the camp.

It was just beginning to get a little dusk when they sighted the crackling fire, and hurrying along, entered camp. Thad looked around. Davy was busy over the fire, and the delightful smell of frying trout told what his occupation must be. Smithy was cutting up some small wood with the camp-hatchet. Both looked up as the hunters came in.

"Where's Bumpus?" asked Thad, quickly scenting trouble.

Davy and Smithy exchanged glances.

"We hoped he'd found you, and come back," observed the former.

"Found us? What do you mean by that?" demanded the scoutmaster.

"We went down to the foot of the pool to fish," explained Davy. "An hour later I came back to get another hook, and I found that Bumpus had disappeared, taking his gun with him."

Thad and Allan exchanged worried glances. With night at hand and that clumsy tenderfoot lost somewhere in the big timber, it was no wonder that a sense of impending trouble, that might yet end in tragedy, oppressed them.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSING TENDERFOOT.

"It looks like poor old Bumpus is lost," said Allan, presently, breaking the silence that had fallen upon them all.

"Lost—whew!" muttered Giraffe, with a suggestive whistle, and an elevation of the eyebrows that stood for a great deal.

"That big booby lost!" said Step Hen.

"What on earth can we do?" Smithy asked.

Again they looked at each other.

Consternation had undoubtedly fallen upon the camp of the scouts, just as though a wet blanket had suddenly been thrown on some pet project. It would have been a matter of more or less concern had Davy Jones failed to turn up after a day's hunt in the big timber, or Giraffe, or Step Hen; but Bumpus, why, no one save himself had ever seriously contemplated the possibility of the fat boy going astray.

And yet, now that they thought of it, how many times had they heard him prophesying that if ever he *did* find himself wandering about alone, he would know how to take care of himself? Bumpus had for a long time been making preparations looking to such a happening. The remembrance of this seemed to cheer the others up a little, after the first shock had passed.

"He was always dreading just this same thing," said Davy Jones.

"And getting ready against the evil day," remarked Allan.

"That was why he bought his little compass," put in Giraffe.

"Ditto his camp hatchet," added Step Hen.

"And I reckon, suh," observed the Southern boy, "that Bumpus had it in mind more than anything else when he took to carrying that piece of window sash cord around with him."

"Sure thing," Giraffe went on. "I've heard him say it was apt to come in handy lots of times."

"And it did," broke in Davy Jones, earnestly.

"If it hadn't been for that same handy rope, fellows, there's no telling what would have happened to *me;* or what gloom might be ahangin' over this here camp right now."

"Good old Bumpus!" murmured Smithy, quite affected.

"Always willing to do his share of the work. You never knew him to shirk, or get a cramp in the stomach," and as Giraffe said this he cast a severe look over in the direction of Davy Jones, who turned red in the face, gave a little uneasy laugh, and hastened to exclaim:

"Oh! that joke is ancient history now, Giraffe, I've reformed since I joined the patrol."

Some years before, the Jones boy had really been subject to violent cramps that gave him great pain, and doubled him up like a jack-knife, or a closed hinge. He was always an object of pity at such times, and had frequently been allowed to go home from school because of his affliction.

But the time came when the teacher observed that

these convenient "cramps" never arrived on a rainy day; and also that Davy recovered in a miraculous fashion, once he reached the open air. And when Davy was simply allowed to retire to a cloak room, to let the "spasm" pass, instead of being started homeward, it was noticed that his complaint quickly disappeared.

So on joining the scouts, Davy, whose dislike for exerting himself had been his weakness, began to have those strange "cramps" whenever some hard work was to be done.

But trust boys for noticing that the pains never, never attacked him when a meal was awaiting attention. And Davy was soon made so ashamed of himself that he did actually "reform," as he now declared.

"Well," Smithy went on to say, "it's some satisfaction, anyhow, to know the poor old elephant is so well fixed, if he does have to pass a night or two in the woods alone."

"He evidently took a lot of grub and matches along," said Davy.

"And if he has a fire, he can do without his blanket," Allan observed.

"While we're pitying him in this way, how do we know but what it may be the best thing in the world for Bumpus," suggested Thad.

"Yes, he needs something like this to give him self-reliance. Bumpus was always ready to follow at the heels of some one who led; but who ever knew him to start out on his own hook?" said Allan.

"If only we could be sure of finding him again, after a couple of days had gone by, it wouldn't be so bad," declared Smithy.

"Who'll tell his folks?" asked Davy Jones, dejectedly.

Thad turned on him like a flash.

"Here, we don't want any of that sort of talk," he said, severely. "We're going to find our missing comrade again, all right. Get that fixed in your mind, Davy. It may be to-morrow, or the day after, or even a week from now, but we'll find him

sooner or later, and he'll know more than he ever did before, too."

"You just bet he will," chuckled Giraffe, as he mentally pictured the fat boy stalking through that great tract of timber, solemnly consulting his compass from time to time, and yet utterly unable to say whether the camp lay to the north, south, east or west.

"It'll just be the making of Bumpus, fellers," ventured Step Hen.

"But see here," remarked Thad, "if he disappeared this morning, how is it you two, Davy and Smithy, let the whole afternoon go by without trying to communicate with us?"

Davy Jones took it upon himself to answer.

"You see, Thad," he began, "in the first place we didn't know for sure the poor old silly was lost, till late in the afternoon. We just kinder felt a bit uneasy, but every time I came to camp after fishin' an hour or so, I expected to see him sitting here."

"But if you grew uneasy, it ought to have been your business to call us in?" continued Thad, as the leader of the patrol.

"Just so, boss," Davy went on to say, "but

you see, it happened that I let Bob White take my gun; and when Bumpus, he let that silly notion to wander get a strangle hold on him, why, he carried off the only other shooting iron we had in camp."

"Oh!" said Thad, "of course. You did all right, Davy. And besides, there's a little chance right now, that Bumpus, in wandering around, may glimpse our fire here, and come in."

"And on that account you mean we ought to keep a bumper blaze going all evenin'," remarked Giraffe, eagerly.

Giraffe's weakness lay in his adoration of fire. It was forever on his mind, and whenever he sat down to rest, his always keen-edged jack-knife was busy whittling shavings.

"Oh! we might want to make a fire later on, who knows; and then these shavings will come in real handy," he would say.

He knew about every means possible for producing a blaze without the use of matches. The patrol leader, afraid lest Giraffe set the woods afire up in Maine, where the law is very particular about such things, had given Giraffe the job of official fire-maker for the camp on condition that he

agreed never to carry matches on his person, but to ask for them as needed.

This put Giraffe on his mettle.

He began experimenting, first with a burning sun-glass, and a pinch of powder to start a blaze in the dry tinder. Then he had used flint and steel successfully. And from this old-time method he advanced along the line, making fires in half a dozen primitive ways, until he came up against one that "stumped" him for a long time.

This was the South Sea Island method of producing heat by friction. The scout had studied it well, made him a little bow, and spent many hours twirling the stick that was rolled back and forward by the cord.

How success finally came, and at a time when it seemed Giraffe really needed a fire, if ever he did in all his life, has been already told in a previous volume of this series.

But the passion for a fire was just as much a part of Giraffe's nature as it had ever been. And this was why his face lighted up, while his eyes glittered with happiness, when he heard the acting scoutmaster admit they ought to keep a good fire going all evening.

Trust Giraffe for that; a wink was as good as a nod to him, when the subject of fire-building was concerned.

Later on, they sat around enjoying the venison steaks, and the trout which had been so beautifully browned in the frying-pan, after several slices of fat salt pork had been "tried out."

"What are you putting that lot aside for, Davy?" asked Thad; just as if he did not know the generous thought which impelled the cook to reserve one good big portion of the supper.

"Why, I thought that mebbe Bumpus might poke along after a bit," replied Davy, adding another crisp trout to the pile he had heaped up, "and if he does, I guess he's apt to be pretty hungry. Bumpus is a good feeder, we all know."

"What d'ye suppose made him do it, Thad?" asked Step Hen.

"There," said the scoutmaster, "that's the question. None of us really know; but we can give a pretty good guess, eh, boys?"

"I should say, yes," spoke up Giraffe. "Bumpus has gone clean crazy over this bear business."

"Said everybody was getting them but him," put in Smithy; "and I'm sure that doesn't apply to me

in the least. I never expect to get a bear; and my only hope is that no bear will get me."

"And even if he didn't actually say the words," went on Giraffe, "his manner stood for it all right—'you just wait, and I'm going to have my chance before long.' And fellers, it's my opinion Bumpus just got tired of waiting for his chance to come to him, so he went out stalkin' after it."

"No use trying to pick up his trail to-night, is there?" asked Step Hen.

Thad shook his head.

"Not in the least," he said. "We'll have to wait until morning, and hope he may show up yet. As I said before, we'll try and keep a fire going all night, so as to show him a beacon, if by good luck he keeps on turning to the left, as lost people nearly always do, and comes back this way."

They sat up rather late, talking. And although the conversation might be of things that had happened in the past, it was easy to see what the chief thought in every one of those boys' minds must be; for never did a rabbit or a squirrel rustle the near-by underbrush that there did not come a look of eager expectancy upon seven faces, that quickly died out again with repeated disappointments.

There is an old saying to the effect that "you never miss the water till the well runs dry." And these seven scouts of the Silver Fox Patrol did not fully realize what a universal favorite Bumpus Hawtree had become until he was missing from camp.

Many times that night when either Allan or Thad, being light sleepers, took it upon themselves to crawl out from their blanket in the tent they occupied, to fix the smouldering fire, they would sit there a bit, and listen to see if by good luck they might hear a distant "halloo."

But only the usual noises of the night greeted them. Around lay the mysterious big timber, and somewhere in the unknown depths of this wide stretch of woods bordering the Rocky Mountain foothills their comrade was camping in solitude, doubtless a prey to lively fears.

So morning found them.

Breakfast was quickly eaten. There was no "cutting up," or boyish pranks shown on this morning. Every one seemed serious, gloomy, oppressed with doubts, and a vague sense of coming trouble.

Thad saw to it that a complete understanding was

arranged with the three who were to remain in camp, being Davy Jones, Bob White and Smithy.

And then the others, having each made up a few rations of food to carry them over possibly a couple of days, prepared to start upon the plain trail of Bumpus, which had been easily found.

A last wave of the hand, a few "good luck go with you's," from the boys in the camp, and then the trackers were swallowed up in the big timber.

CHAPTER VI.

FORCED TO THINK FOR HIMSELF.

"WHAT time d'ye suppose it is, Thad?"

Step Hen asked the question. Perhaps he was a little tired himself, for the four scouts had been constantly on the go since early morning, and it was now getting well on into the afternoon.

They had kept on the zigzag trail left by Bumpus. As a rule it had been very easy following, and afforded all of them considerable enjoyment, because Bumpus knew nothing at all concerning the art of hiding a trail, and would have had no object in doing so, even had he been educated along this line.

But there were times when it happened that the formation of the ground interfered to some extent with their making progress, since even Allan and Thad had considerable to learn about reading signs.

"Oh! about four o'clock," replied Thad, and in-

stead of consulting his little nickel watch when saying this, he cast a quick glance upward to where a glimpse of the sun could be obtained through an opening in the tops of the exceedingly tall trees.

Thus the habit of observation is encouraged in a scout. He learns to depend less upon the devices of civilization, and more on such natural resources as the primitive folks enjoyed.

"Let's see how close you came to it," remarked Giraffe, as he took out the cheap but effective dollar watch the patrol leader carried. "Well, now, what d'ye think of that for hittin' the bull's eye plumb in the center."

He held the watch up to show that the hands pointed exactly to four. Thad laughed.

"Perhaps I couldn't hit it as close as that in a dozen times," he admitted. "But it's always easy to get pretty near the hour, day or night, if you only fall into the habit of noticing where the sun, moon or stars should be. There isn't a time in the night, if the sky happens to be clear, but what I can tell you the hour within ten minutes anyhow."

"Have we gained any on Bumpus?" asked Giraffe.

At this question the scoutmaster shook his head.

"I'm sorry to say we don't seem to gain any," he remarked. "Where we picked up some at times, we lost again when the trail got faint."

"Huh! looks like an endless task, then," grunted Step Hen. "Bumpus keeps tramping along, every day, and when night comes we're just the same distance behind. Seems to me we'll just never get him at that rate."

"Oh!" replied Thad, not at all dismayed, "we'll just keep at it, you know. Lots of things are apt to happen to help us. Bumpus will tire out soon. Then he may get discouraged, and just make up his mind to stay in camp till we come."

"Which would be a mighty sensible thing for him to do," declared Step Hen.

"But that wouldn't fetch him his bear," chuckled Giraffe, "and that's the one thing worth living for with Bumpus right now."

"Mebbe he's got over the fever," suggested Step Hen. "P'raps a reaction has set in by now."

"Let's hope so, anyhow," remarked Allan.

"And so Bumpus was about here yesterday at four P. M.," said Giraffe, "Don't I wonder where he is now."

"And what he's doing," added Step Hen. "One

thing sure, he hadn't run across that bear of his up to this point."

"Which I take it was a lucky thing for Bumpus," Giraffe went on.

"Come on, fellows," Thad went on to say, "we've still got the trail in front of us, and it seems to lead across that boggy stretch ahead. Here's where he walked along the edge. Then for some reason or other he started to cross over."

"Which I take it was a fool play for Bumpus," grunted Giraffe. "Chances are a fellow of his heft would get stuck in the mud and mired."

"Mebbe he thought he saw his bear on the other side," suggested Step Hen.

Thad had plunged in, regardless of the mud. Where Bumpus went it seemed to be their duty to follow.

"Whew! wouldn't this give Smithy a heartache though?" remarked Giraffe, when the mud came half way to their knees, and seemed so sticky that it was only through some exertion that they lifted each foot.

"But, much as he'd hate to do it," Thad observed, proudly, "Smithy would follow wherever his leader went. He's learned the rules by which

all true scouts are governed, and obedience is one of them. What is it, Allan?" he went on, as the other uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Hold up, don't go a step further!" called out the other.

"What's the matter?" demanded Step Hen, getting his gun ready, and casting a glance up at the branches of the trees as though he half expected to see a sleek gray panther crouched in a fork, ready to pounce down upon them.

"Look at the dry mud splattered on the trunk of that tree;" continued Allan, pointing.

And after they had looked, the four scouts exchanged horrified glances.

"It's a sink hole!" exclaimed Giraffe, turning pale.

"And poor old Bumpus was caught in the mud. He splashed around like a stranded porpoise, and that threw the stuff up on that tree trunk," Step Hen went on to say.

"Oh! it can't be as bad as that, can it, Thad?" asked Giraffe in a tremulous tone, as his eyes remained glued on the treacherous surface of the bog about the place where Bumpus had been caught and held as in a vise.

Was it possible their poor comrade could have sunk out of sight under that smooth deceptive surface? The thought was too terrible.

All at once Thad uttered a cry, and the others noticed that it seemed to have a little ring of joy about it, rather than gloom.

"Hold my gun and my haversack, fellows," said the patrol leader.

To the surprise of the others he started to climb a tree that had low limbs some of them not more than eight feet above the surface of the bog.

"What in the dickens is he up to?" exclaimed Step Hen.

"Watch, and you'll see," Allan went on to say.

"Do you know, Allan?" demanded Giraffe.

"I can give a guess, but I don't want to spoil it all by telling," the other replied. "Both of you stand right where you are, and don't move a foot ahead, or you may get in the same trouble Bumpus did, and without his means of crawling out of the hole."

At these mysterious words Giraffe and Step Hen exchanged looks of amazement. They could not for the life of them imagine Bumpus capable of doing anything that would be beyond them.

"There, Thad's managed to get to a place just above where Bumpus must have been stuck," Allan went on.

"He's actually laughing!" exclaimed Step Hen.

"What's struck you as funny, Thad?" called out Giraffe, unable to hold in.

"Well, as sure as you live, boys, he did it," replied the scoutmaster.

"Did what?" demanded both Step Hen and Giraffe in concert.

"Got out of the muck bed."

"But how could he, Thad? That limb must a been two feet above his head when he stood there knee deep or more, in the mud. Tell us how?" pleaded Step Hen.

"Here are the plain marks," Thad went on, "where the bark of the tree was bruised, as it had a right to be with such a heavy weight as Bumpus."

"Marks!" repeated Giraffe. "Good gracious! hurry up and tell us. Marks of what, Thad?"

"The rope!" replied the other, still laughing.

"Rope! Bumpus used his blessed old rope to drag himself out of the mud sink! Well, well, well, if that don't beat the Dutch," Giraffe cried out.

"It reflects great credit on Bumpus," said the

scoutmaster, warmly. "He must have quickly made up his mind that he could only sink deeper in by keeping up his floundering. Then that nice limb above his head caught his eye, and he remembered about the rope."

"Bully for Bumpus," cried Giraffe.

"I'm proud to call him my comrade," added Step Hen, warmly.

"It must have taxed him a whole lot to drag himself up," said Thad, "because he's so heavy, you know."

"A case of 'root hog, or die,' I take it," Step Hen remarked; "and when he had to face the music Bumpus proved real game. You're sure he made it, are you, Thad?"

"Heaps of evidence to that effect," replied the other. "Rope's gone, in the first place. Then here's dried mud a plenty, showing that our pard was in this tree. I can even see which way he went, by the marks he left; and he was determined enough to cross the slough, for he kept right on."

"Suppose you follow him in the trees, Thad," sang out Allan, "while we hunt a better place to cross over without getting mired. We'll join you

later. Give a call when you've landed, and got his trail again."

"Fine," commended the patrol leader. "I'll get busy here then."

He began climbing along the limb, and succeeded in safely passing into the adjoining tree, just as Bumpus must have done. How the clumsy fat boy had succeeded in carrying out these capers puzzled the agile Thad, for at times it tried even his agility to make progress.

But Thad was delighted to know that Bumpus, upon being thrown on his own resources, could make good.

Before a great while his loud call announced to the others, who had just succeeded in finding a safe ford across the water and mud, that Thad was once more on the ground, and ready to take up the trail.

The little party started on again.

Both Giraffe and Step Hen were filled with secret admiration for the stout comrade whom they had always been in the habit of rather looking down on as a good natured fellow, but rather incapable.

"Don't for the life of me see how he ever done it," Giraffe would say.

"Beats everything, and after this we ain't got

any business to look on Bumpus as a big baby. He got out of that hole just fine," Step Hen would add.

Half an hour later, Allan came to a sudden halt.

"Ashes of a fire!" he remarked, pointing to his feet.

"Then here's where Bumpus must a spent last night?" suggested Step Hen, looking curiously about.

"Wonder what he had to eat?" remarked Giraffe.

"Oh! plenty of grub," Thad said, laughingly. "Look, here's the rind from a slice of our ham. Davy said he'd cut some off."

"Think of the nerve of him," declared Step Hen. "But I just can see this rough experience is goin' to be the makin' of Bumpus."

"Reminds me of the story of the bull pup," remarked Thad, laughing. "You know, the boy had brought home a young bulldog, and the old man, to encourage the pup, had gone down on his hands and knees to bark at him, when the dog grabbed him by the nose and held on like fun. And while the old man was trying to break away, the boy was

sicking the dog on, all the time shouting: "Stand it, dad, stand it as long as you can, because it's going to be the making of the pup!"

Allen had been bending over the fire while all this talk was going on. He now looked up to remark:

"Guess he stuck several potatoes in his bag, too, before he started out," and he held up a couple of blackened skins, showing that the interior had been gauged out after the potatoes had been baked in the hot ashes.

"Good for Bumpus, he's learning to take care of himself fast," cried Thad.

"That isn't all," remarked Allan, smiling.

"What next?" asked Thad.

"Bumpus shows he's bound to be something of a hunter yet," declared Allan, "and what he learned up in Maine has been in his mind ever since."

"Do you mean about leaving fires burning when breaking camp, and the danger of the wind carrying the hot ashes among the dead leaves?" the scoutmaster went on to say, for he had eyes of his own, and had been watching Allan's actions even while talking with the others.

"That's just what I do mean," the other continued. "In the first place Bumpus knew enough

to make his camp close to running water, so he could get a drink whenever he wanted it."

"I see he did," Thad went on to say, glancing toward the gurgling little stream that ran not twenty feet away.

"And when he left here this morning," continued Allan, "he made sure to carry water from the creek and sprinkle the fire till it was dead. Look, you can see for yourself that it's been wet down."

"Hurray for Bumpus!" exclaimed Giraffe.

"I can see him passing the examination for a first-class scout some of these fine days," added Step Hen. "Who'd ever think it of him?"

They pushed on once more, after Allan had even shown them the very stick on one end of which Bumpus had thrust his slice of smoked ham, and cooked it, after a fashion. Step Hen put it up to his nose, and vouched for the accuracy of Allan's assertion.

But all the boys were a little tired, and when it grew too dark under the trees to see the trail of the lost tenderfoot they eagerly welcomed Thad's suggestion that they rest up for the night.

So Giraffe was instructed to build a cooking fire

at a certain place. It happened to be in a little natural basin, and here the four boys ate their supper, over which they talked earnestly, but there was no hilarity.

Later on while the others were partly done with their meal, Allan left the circle and said he would take a little stroll. He went up the rise, as though desirous of seeing what lay beyond.

The moon was about three-quarters full, and hung in the eastern sky; but under the big trees it was almost dark.

Shortly afterward Allan came hurrying back, declaring that he had discovered what looked to be a lone camp-fire, at some distance away in the woods.

"Perhaps it's Bumpus," suggested Step Hen, eagerly, jumping up, although still hungry.

"Then he didn't go far on the second day, or else he's been traveling in a circle and got back near where he started out from," said Giraffe.

"Let's head over that way," Step Hen went on to say.

"And surprise him, eh? That's the ticket, boys," Giraffe continued.

"That fire is a good long ways off," warned Allan.

"Don't care if it is."

"It looked like a star at first, and must be on rising ground, where the trees are more open," the discoverer continued.

"Lead us to it. We want to surprise Bumpus," both the others declared.

"How about it, Thad?" Allan asked.

"It's the only thing we can do," replied the scoutmaster. "If it proves to be Bumpus, we hadn't ought to take any chances of losing him again in the morning. If you're all of the same mind, let's be off."

So the fire was carefully extinguished, and Allan led his comrades to the top of the little rise. Here he pointed out the object he said was a campfire, although Giraffe and Step Hen believed they would have taken it for a star low down near the horizon, had they noticed it at all.

After their bearings had been carefully taken, in order that they might head in a direct line for the fire, they started forth.

By degrees the seeming star grew into a light of the first magnitude, and finally even the two less

experienced scouts were ready to affirm that it must be a camp-fire.

They kept on going.

"We'll sure give old Bumpus the biggest surprise of his life," chuckled Step Hen, as they drew nearer the place.

Of course they made some noise pushing along through the almost dark woods, but then Bumpus would not be apt to hear that. Perhaps the poor tired fellow was already fast asleep alongside the fire.

A few minutes later, and the boys were very close to the blaze. Giraffe thrust up his head above the bushes, which he was better fitted by Nature for doing than any of his comrades.

"Don't see a sign of him about, fellers," he whispered, ducking down again.

Thereupon the others also raised their heads to look. There was the fire, burning cheerfully, and showing that it must have had recent care. But not a single sign of a human being was to be seen.

It was very strange.

"Mebbe he heard us coming, and thought it was a bear," suggested Step Hen.

"And in that case I guess Bumpus would take to a tree," Giraffe added.

"Perhaps we ought to step out right away, and let him know," came from Allan.

"I should say, yes," Giraffe went on, "I know for one I'd hate to be peppered with the loads he carries in that Marlin scatter gun of his. Hello! there, Bumpus, hold your fire. It's your chums come to look you up."

The four scouts had arisen to their feet, and were just about to push out from behind the fringe of bushes, in order to show themselves to Bumpus, when they were electrified to hear a voice, gruff and surly, and certainly not that of their jolly companion, call loudly:

"Jest hold up yer hands, you fellers, for we've sure got ye kivered!"

CHAPTER VII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

"WHAT'S all this mean?" said Thad, laughingly, although he did not fail to do as he had been ordered.

Two rather rough looking men came out of the scrub, carrying guns which seemed to be handled rather carelessly, seeing that they were evidently ready for immediate use.

"Why, consarn it all, Pierre, they're on'y a pack o' boys arter all, and not sojers," the larger man exclaimed, staring hard at the four scouts, some of whom wore various parts of their regular khaki uniforms, as well as the regulation campaign hat of the Boy Scout organization.

"*Sacre!* zat ees so," the other man exploded, and Thad knew instantly from his name and manner of speech that Pierre must be one of those French Canadian half-breeds of whom he had heard so much."

"That's just what we are, my friends," Thad hastened to remark; "we belong to a Boy Scout troop in the East, and came out here to have a hunt in the Rockies. One of our number, a very fat boy, wandered off, and got lost in the big timber. We were following up his trail, and trying to locate him, when we discovered a camp-fire over here. So you see, we walked another mile just to give our friend a little surprise. But we hope you'll let us take down our hands now, because it's hard to hold them up like this."

The two men exchanged looks. Then they lowered the hammers of their guns. The action signified that, according to their way of thinking, they had nothing to fear from these half-grown lads.

"Cum an' set down an' tell us a lot more," said the big man, with the red face, and the crafty eyes, Thad could not bring himself to like, because he seemed to see wells of treachery in their depths.

So the boys dropped down again, being more foot-weary than ever. But taking a cue from Allan and Thad, the other two scouts kept their guns close beside them. Apparently none of them exactly liked the looks of the two strangers; and they

were not accustomed to much reading of character, either.

"War his name Bumpus?" asked the American.

"Just what it was," flashed out Giraffe; "but how did you know that? Have you met up with our lost pard?"

"Sho! ain't I got ears, an' didn't one o' ye call out that same name when ye was agoin' ter walk inter our camp?" demanded the other, gruffly.

Thad was on the alert.

He did not feel favorably impressed by the looks of the two men. Besides, he noticed a crafty, greedy expression cross their faces whenever they allowed their eyes to rest on Step Hen's new repeating rifle. Evidently the neatness of the little weapon quite captured them, and made them envy the boy its possession.

And Thad was of the opinion that two such rough-looking customers would not hesitate long about trying to obtain anything they coveted.

The conversation soon became more general, the men wanting to know how it was these boys, almost wholly inexperienced in the ways of the woods as they took them to be, were venturesome enough

to start into the foothills of the Rockies without a single guide along.

So Thad explained how they had engaged a pair of guides, both of whom had disappointed them, one by getting sick, and the other in taking up with a couple of big-horn sportsmen.

"But we heard of a man up here somewhere," Thad went on, "who'd been logger, trapper, timber cruiser and everything; and people said that if we could only run across Toby Smathers, and he took the job, we'd have a guide worth any two men."

"What's thet? Toby Smathers, did ye say?" demanded the other, that crafty look coming into his face again.

"Yes, that was the name; do you happen to know him?" asked Giraffe, eagerly.

"Reckons now, as none o' ye ever run acrost Toby; air thet right?" asked the man.

"We never have," replied Thad.

The fellow laughed harshly.

"Thet shore is a fack," he went on to say. "Jest think o' it, Pierre Laporte, they's askin' o' me ef I ever run acrost Toby Smathers? Ain't thet a good joke, though? I've kerried a few names in my day, younkers, an' Toby Smathers be one o' 'em."

"Oh! then you're the very man we've been looking for, eh?" but while Thad uttered this sentiment, there did not seem to be any great amount of enthusiasm in his manner, Allan thought.

"He believes the fellow lies; and I just know it," Allan was saying to himself.

"An' if so be ye wanter make me a offer, spot cash, ter guide ye boys through the big timber, find yer missin' chum, and show ye some big-horn huntin' in the Rockies, I'm yer man; on'y make the price wuth my while, an' cash down, spot cash."

Thad said he had no doubt it could be easily arranged to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. His object was really to gain time. He had received a secret sign from Allan, which told him just as plainly as so many words would have done that his chum had something of importance to communicate, as soon as they could get their heads together.

Step Hen and Giraffe had apparently swallowed the story offered by the self-called Toby Smathers without a suspicion. They were now entertaining the two men with some accounts of previous experiences. The fellows seemed to be in high spirits. They would nudge each other, and laugh

boisterously on the slightest pretense. And sometimes they would laugh when there was no humorous story being told; a look exchanged between them being sufficient grounds for hilarity.

"They're sure enough feeling pretty fine," thought Thad; "and it strikes me they think they've got a little joke of their own that they're playing on us. Three to one it's about that name, too. I just can't believe that man answers to the description I've had of Toby Smathers. Why, they said he was just the picture of an honest wood's ranger, employed by the Government to watch out for timber thieves, forest fires and the likes. And that man's face would condemn him on sight before any judge."

Just then he heard Allan say he was thirsty, and must get a drink. The stream ran near by, and Thad noticed how the cautious Maine boy carried his gun along with him as he went.

A minute or so later Thad also arose.

"I'm as dry as a bone," he observed, "and I think I'd like a drink about the size of the one Allan's getting. Wait here, fellows."

He added these last words as a sop to quiet the suspicions of Pierre and the man who called himself

Toby Smathers. They had frowned, and made an impatient movement upon noticing that Thad, too, took his gun along with him, rather a queer thing to do when only going for a drink.

But Thad's last words apparently served to disarm their suspicions. They had two of the boys held as hostages, at any rate.

Thad found his chum much excited. A drink just then was about the last thing Allan Hollister was thinking about.

"What is it?" asked Thad, in a whisper.

"Let's laugh a little, out loud, so they won't be suspicious," said the other; and after that clever dodge had been carried out, he went on to add: "you didn't believe what he said about that name, did you, Thad?"

"I certainly don't believe he's the man we're looking for up here," came the answer.

"That's right," Allan went on, "and I know he's a fraud. He wants to get hold of anything we have that's worth taking. That gun of Step Hen's seems to just take his eye."

"Do you know who he is?" demanded Thad.

"I can give a pretty close guess, now that we heard the name of his companion, Pierre Laporte,"

said Allan. "Some men down at the post where we got the mules told me to look out for a half-breed by that name, who kept company with an even worse scoundrel named Hank Dodge. And this is Hank, all right, make up your mind to that, Thad."

"Rascal is written big all over his face, I can see," the other went on. "But what is their line—just plain scamps, or timber cruisers?"

"There are different kinds of timber scouts or cruisers, they tell me," Allan continued. "Some are honest men, working for honest lumber dealers. Others spy out rich tracts on Government land, which the big company of thieves they're hired by, want to cut next winter. The Government loses millions on millions every year that way. And these crafty fellows are up here looking for timber that can be easily stolen and marketed next winter."

"What had we better do?" asked Thad. "It wouldn't be safe for us to spend the night in camp with them."

"I should say not," replied Allan earnestly. "If we go in the ordinary way the chances are they'll jump on us. So I suppose we might as well up and tell them we know who they are, and that

we don't propose staying any longer in their company."

"They'll be as mad as hornets," suggested Thad.

"Let 'em," replied the other, "four guns are better than two, any day. Come on back to the fire right away."

As they drew near, Allan whispered:

"He's got it right now, Step Hen's rifle, I mean. Reckon he asked to see it, and our chum handed it over. Chances are he won't give it back again in a hurry. There, what did I tell you; he's laid it down beside him, Thad?"

"Now's our time to cut in, then," said the patrol leader. "You watch out for Pierre, and don't let him slip up on you, or there'll be heaps of trouble. Cover him when I do the other. Ready? Then here goes."

And ten seconds later those by the fire heard Thad call out in ringing tones."

"It's your turn, Pierre and Hank Dodge, to hold up your hands. Quick now, or it'll be the worse for you. The tables are turned—up with them!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCOUT SHOULD ALWAYS BE ON THE ALERT.

When the young scoutmaster chose to, he could put a world of meaning in his voice. And those two timber cruisers, upon seeing both guns covering them so steadily, doubtless realized that firearms are no respecter of persons; since a weapon fired by a lad is just as sure to make good, if held correctly, as though a mature man looked along the barrel.

And so they complied with the order, although grumblingly, and evidently loth to admit that a couple of boys had gotten the better of them.

"This hyars a nice how-d'ye-do, treatin' yer guide like he was pizen mean. What d'ye mean by it, younker?" growled the man who had claimed to be Toby Smathers, the forest ranger.

"Oh! it only means that we've guessed who you are," remarked Thad, calmly. "We were warned

down at the post to look out for a couple of unscrupulous timber cruisers by the name of Hank Dodge and Pierre Laporte. And we don't want to have anything to do with you, that's all."

"Take keer, young feller, who yer insultin'," growled Hank, ominously.

"Oh!" said Giraffe, airily, who made sure to have his own gun ready in his hands at the time he spoke in such boasting tones, "we don't scare so easy, Mister Hank Dodge, if that's your name. Fact is, the boys of the Silver Fox Patrol have helped gather in a few men even more dangerous than you and your pal ever dared to be."

"Be still, Giraffe," ordered Thad, who knew it was unwise to add to the anger of the ruffians. "Now, we don't mean to bother you at all, Hank Dodge. Our business up here has nothing to do with timber cruisers; and we're not hired by the Government to watch for any steels of lumber, or land frauds. We came here to camp out, and to hunt. And just now we're busy looking up the comrade who has lost himself in these big woods. Do you understand what I say?"

"Reckon as how ye put it plain enuff, younker," replied the other, wondering if Thad noticed that he

was gradually lowering his arms; but the very next words uttered by the boy told him this.

"Hold 'em up high again, Hank! I don't want to have to shoot you through the shoulder or the legs, but I will, if you try to grab up that rifle."

With a string of hard words the man elevated his hands once more; but if black looks could kill, Thad must have expired on the spot.

"Step Hen," said the patrol leader.

"Yes, what is it, Thad?"

"Go forward, and recover your gun," the other went on, severely. "I'm surprised at you letting it get out of your hands at all. A wide-awake scout should be smarter than that. And Step Hen!"

"Yes."

"Be sure you don't for even a second get between the muzzle of my gun and our friend Hank, there; because I'm going to shoot the very second he makes the first move looking to grabbing either you, or the gun. Hear that, Step Hen?"

"Sure I do, Thad, and I'll be careful, just as you say," came the reply.

The boy crept up on one side, and lying down flat on his chest, reached out an arm, thus starting to

draw his own highly-prized little repeater toward him.

Hank could see it going, and ground his teeth in helpless rage, for he could also watch the determined gleam in those convincing eyes of Thad Brewster, and only too well did he know what sort of hard luck would be apt to overtake him, if he but allowed himself to be tempted too far.

When Step Hen gripped his little gun once more, he made haste to draw back the hammer. And thus a fourth weapon was brought to bear upon the persons of the two notorious timber thieves.

Hank Dodge laughed.

It was not a mirthful sound at all, but rather caused a shiver to pass through the forms of those who heard it.

"We throws up ther sponge, me an' Pierre, don't we, ole hoss?" said Hank.

"Four against two—zat ees too mooch odds. We cave; we gif in; we cry out, enough!" exclaimed the ferret-eyed French Canadian *voyageur*, who, they said, had once been the factor at a Hudson Bay Fur Company's post until he betrayed his trust, and fled to the States with a bunch of money belonging to his employers.

"Well, we want to say good-night then, to both of you," said Thad.

"We ain't agoin' ter forget this, let me tell yer," replied Hank.

"I don't see why there need be any hard feelings between us," Thad went on. "It's only tit for tat. You held us up first, and now we've returned the favor. And we haven't taken anything from you, Hank Dodge."

"But—held up by a pack o' kids; we'll never be able ter look each other in the face agin till it's wiped out, sum way," the man went on to say, angrily.

Thad knew that further argument would be useless. There was only one thing men of their calibre could appreciate, and that was force.

"Oh! well," he said, as if carelessly, "you can do just as you please about it. But I want to tell you this plainly, right on the start. We're all armed, and can shoot as well as the next one. We're no tenderfeet, like our chum who is lost. And if in spite of this plain warning you choose to molest us, look out you don't get something you won't like. That's all I'm going to say; but you can put it in your pipe and smoke it. Back off, fellows, but keep

'em both covered, and shoot if they try to grab up a gun!"

So the four scouts backed out of the hostile camp, the air of which did not seem to agree with them. Those avaricious eyes belonging to Hank Dodge did not create a favorable impression on any of the young campers.

"I sure believe he meant to keep my dandy little gun," Step Hen was muttering, as, having passed out of sight of the two timber cruisers, the scouts walked along in couples, on the alert for any signs of further trouble.

"Just what he expected to do," replied Thad. "And another time we happen on any unknown men in this part of the country, see to it that you keep your gun in your own possession, Step Hen."

"I sure will," replied the other, humbly enough; "I had my lesson, all right."

"What if they're coming after us?" suggested Giraffe; and the very possibility of such a thing caused Step Hen to utter a little cry of alarm, and turn in several directions, as though expecting to discover crouching foes, or see the flash that would accompany the discharge of a hostile gun.

But nothing happened; and presently Allan, who

had been looking back over his shoulder many times, announced that there was no danger.

"They haven't left the camp up to now," he said, positively. "I can see their figures moving in front of the fire. It's all right, boys. We can go, and settle down after a little for the night."

Presently Thad called a halt.

"Here, we can make a stop," he announced. "There's a little swale at the base of this rocky hill. If we wanted we could make a small fire, and finish our supper. I don't think they'd see it; and besides, Allan and myself will stand guard up on the ridge here."

This plan was carried out, since they had not wholly satisfied their appetites at the time Allan discovered the camp-fire which they supposed had been kindled by the lost tenderfoot, Bumpus.

Afterwards Thad and Allan came in, the fire having been extinguished, and ate a little. Then they talked in low tones.

"It makes me feel uneasy," remarked Giraffe, "to think of that poor innocent thing of a Bumpus, who wouldn't lift a finger to hurt even a fly, wanderin' around all alone in these big woods."

"Yes," added Step Hen, seriously enough, "and

with a couple of hard cases like that Hank Dodge and Pierre Laporte around. What if he was unlucky enough to run across 'em? wouldn't they just take revenge on our poor fat chum. I hope that don't happen."

Thad was not saying anything, but it struck him that the fellow who could show enough ingenuity to get himself out of a quicksand, or a muck bed, the way Bumpus had done, might be far from the ignoramus some of his comrades still chose to believe him.

"I'm getting sleepy, and I move we turn in," suggested Giraffe after more time had elapsed.

"Well, hold on then, because we've got to make a move out of this basin," said the shrewd patrol leader.

"Seems a good enough place to bunk in," grumbled the sleepy Giraffe.

"But dangerous at that," Thad remarked. "Those men may have glimpsed our fire, and give us a call. We'll not be at home to them. I've been told that a hunted man never sleeps where he eats. Come along; it won't be far, I promise you."

After a short walk, Thad announced that in his

opinion, as well as that of Allan, it was now safe for them to lie down, and get what sleep they could.

"I hope Bumpus is as well off, and got plenty to eat still," were the last words Giraffe spoke; "I remember the time we got twisted in our bearings up in Maine, and nary a match between us, with a cold night at hand. But I got fire all right with my little apparatus. Besides, there was two of us, and it don't seem near so lonely when you've got company along, even if it is only a tenderfoot scout."

Soon all of them had made themselves as comfortable as possible. The absence of blankets was going to be severely felt. Without a camp-fire to cheer them, Thad feared they would be shivering before morning, even if it was the good old summer time. The atmosphere close to the foothills of the great Rockies is quite varified, and the nights are apt to seem even cold.

The four scouts were pretty tired, and they not only went to sleep quickly, but they slumbered heavily—it might have been hours for all any one of them could say, when they were suddenly awakened by a series of heavy crashes and detonations that sounded very much as though an earthquake had shaken the Rockies to their foundation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEAN TRICK OF THE TIMBER CRUISERS.

"A LAND SLIDE!" exclaimed Giraffe, as he sat up, and began twisting his long neck around, as though doubtful whether he should dodge to the right or to the left, since it was difficult to locate the direction from whence the furious racket seemed to come.

"Better say an earthquake!" Step Hen managed to articulate, though he was shaking all over, with the excitement, that he would hardly have recognized his own voice. "I c'n feel the old ground shake! Listen, would you, to that smash! Must be volcanoes around here."

"Keep still, and listen," said Thad, in that tone of authority which both the talkers recognized as belonging to the scoutmaster, rather than their Chum Thad.

So they held their tongues, and strained their ears to listen.

There was no trouble in hearing, for the racket still kept up. There were heavy thuds, crashes, and a breaking of bushes. No wonder the scouts were mystified. No wonder one thought it a landslide, while another believed some supposed extinct volcano had burst into action again, and that the rain of stones that followed, produced these weird sounds.

All at once the racket stopped, just as suddenly as though a command had been given to "cease firing."

"Well, I declare, if that ain't funny, now," remarked Step Hen, but because of the order for silence which Thad had issued, he dared not breathe a word above a whisper.

"Hark!" said Allan.

Surely that sounded like a hoarse laugh. The boys crouched there, and strained their ears to hear more. Once or twice they thought they caught vague sounds. It was as if some one might be moving along the rocky elevation that formed one side of the near-by little basin in which they had made their small fire, and finished their once inter-

rupted supper. But the sounds were moving further away, as though the unknown parties might be retreating.

Then silence, deep and profound, brooded over the immediate vicinity of the spot where the four startled scouts sat.

"May we talk now, Thad?" asked Giraffe.

"Yes, but let it be in a low voice," replied the patrol leader.

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed Step Hen, just as though he had to let the pent-up steam escape, one way or another, and it took the form of this expression.

"What does it all mean?" asked Step Hen, plainly confused, and unable to clearly grasp the truth.

"I think I know," remarked Thad.

"Then tell us, please," quickly asked Giraffe. "Sounded like a laugh to me."

"Just what it was, too," Thad went on.

"But who'd want to act funny when all that racket was going on, Thad?" continued Giraffe, who seemed unusually thick headed just then, possibly on account of being aroused in such a startling manner.

"The men who made all the row," replied the scoutmaster.

"Men who made the row—great governor! d'ye mean these rowdies, Hank and Pierre?" burst out Giraffe.

"No other," said Thad, positively. "They must have located our little fire in some way, and supposed that we were sleeping close by. So they crept up along the side of that bare ridge, where the stones are so thick, and just started to heave a few dozen down. That's why it sounded like thunder and hail combined.

"The cowards!" hissed Giraffe, whose honest blood seemed to almost boil with indignation; "the sneaks! Afraid to face four boys because they believed we could shoot some, they had to crawl around to the back door, and play a trick that you'd think would be about the size of the meanest boy in our home town of Cranford, Brose Griffin."

"They laughed over it, too," burst out Step Hen, almost as angry as his long-legged chum, "and that shows what kind of fellows they are."

"Altogether, it was a lucky escape for us," remarked Allan.

"That's what," added Giraffe. "And we owe

a heap to Thad's long head. Never sleep where you eat—that was a pretty good rule for the old hunter to have, when painted Injuns were all around him. And by George! it seems to be all right, even in these modern days."

"Wow! just think what a time we'd a had," observed Step Hen, "if we'd been sleepin' there just as sweetly as—as the babes in the woods, and all of a sudden them rocks began to smash around us. I can just see the whole blessed outfit scrambling in the dark, trying to get behind trees, and yet not knowing which side of the trunk was the safe side."

Step Hen actually chuckled a little, as though a gleam of humor had begun to light up the serious nature of the situation.

"It was a game just in keeping with such a precious pair of rascals," declared Thad. "They might have injured some of us badly; and that was just what they hoped to do."

"Perhaps killed us in the bargain," Allan added. "Some of the rocks they heaved into that little basin were just fierce. They came down like cannon balls. It was like what Rip Van Winkle heard,

when the little old men of the Catskills were playing ten pins with big rocks."

"But Thad," remarked Giraffe, "when they get to thinking it over, don't you reckon now they'll guess they didn't do any damage?"

"Just what was in my mind," replied the leader of the patrol. "They must know that even men would have yelled, and shown all sorts of excitement, when bombarded in that way. But let 'em think what they please. I hope we'll never cross their trail again."

"Second the wish," said Allan.

"That's where I differ with you," declared the aroused Giraffe, "I'd just like to pay the cowards back for that dirty trick; and I will, too, if the chance ever comes along."

"I'm only bothering about one thing," observed Step Hen.

"And what's that?" Thad inquired.

"What if they run across our innocent chum, poor old Bumpus?" Step Hen went on to say, "Why, he's so confiding, and so straight himself, that he couldn't believe wrong of anybody. Why, they'd rob him of his gun, and everything else he had; and then turn him loose like that, in the big

timber. Oh! I hope they just don't find Bumpus before we get to him. It would be a shame!"

"Like taking candy from the baby," added Giraffe.

"Well, let's go to sleep again! We can talk it over in the morning," suggested Thad.

"Don't believe I c'n sleep another wink," declared Step Hen.

But in spite of his gloomy prophecy, he did drop off again soon after stretching himself out on the ground, in the softest spot he could find; and knew nothing more until some one shook him. Looking up, Step Hen discovered that the dawn was stealing through the timber, and that Thad bent over him.

The other two were already astir. Giraffe was busying himself, as usual, in getting a little fire underway; for Thad had given it as his opinion that after playing such a dastardly mean trick, Hank and Pierre, the lawless timber cruisers, would not feel like venturing over in this quarter again, lest they be greeted with a warm fire from the guns of the boys.

All of the scouts felt more or less chilled, as the

early morning air was pretty cool, and consequently the fire proved acceptable.

As they munched their breakfast Thad announced that he had found the trail of Bumpus again. This meant that when they were ready to start out, there would be little delay.

Of course, pretty much all the talk was about the event of the preceding night, and the fortunes of their lost comrade.

"When I shut my eyes," said Giraffe, "I c'n just see that blessed innocent awalkin' through these here woods, awhistlin' for his bear to come out and be shot."

"And I'm wonderin'," remarked Step Hen, "whether Bumpus, if he does run across a cinnamon bear, just through the luck greenhorns seem to have, would climb his tree *first,* and then begin shooting; or just bang away, like he did before, and make for a tree afterwards."

"Oh! well, I guess Bumpus learned his little lesson that time, all right," declared Giraffe, with the superior air of one who had already gotten *his* bear, and could afford to look down on those not so fortunate.

"He was scared, good and hard," Step Hen

went on. "Why, his face looked like pie paste, and his goggle eyes fairly stood out of his head when he couldn't get up in that tree, with the old grizzly a comin' for him, growlin', and champin' his teeth."

Thad only smiled as he heard these remarks that had an undercurrent vein of condescending pity for the tenderfoot chum. If he remembered correctly, Bumpus was not the only frightened scout about the time that wounded grizzly charged the camp. He had plenty of company.

When they had finished eating, the fire was put out; and after that they made for the spot where Thad had found the trail of the lost scout.

It was as plain as day just there, even though some twenty-four hours must have elapsed since the fat and ambitious Nimrod passed that way.

Giraffe and Step Hen were suspicious of the two rascally timber cruisers, and persisted in keeping their eyes constantly on the alert, searching every possible spot for an ambuscade, and holding their guns ready for quick work.

The patrol leader did not attempt to interfere, although he and Allan were of the opinion that the men would not bother trying to look them up. It

gave the boys more or less practice, and did no harm.

And so the little bunch of scouts started to once more lift the trail of their missing chum.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOB-CAT.

THE morning was half gone, and they had been making pretty fair progress.

"But," said Giraffe, when Allan mentioned this fact, "if we're only holding our own, that means we'll never glimpse the poor old chap in a week, 'less he just drops down from being so worn out, reduced to skin and bones, so to speak," and both he and Step Hen chuckled at the possibility of Bumpus ever coming to such an end.

"Oh! I don't know," said Allan. "There's always a chance that you might sight him somewhere. You see, he turns every which way. Now he's heading almost north; and a little while back it was nearly due east. Perhaps he may double on his tracks yet; we can't tell."

"And if he did, and happened to discover all our footprints, what d'ye think the blessed innocent would do?" asked Giraffe.

"Be scared stiff, most likely, and think Injuns must be trailing him, bound to take his scalp," laughed Step Hen.

Thad stopped for a minute's breathing spell.

"I think both of you are wrong there," he remarked, "and if Bumpus did only happen to come on his own trail, after we'd passed along, the chances are he'd just make up his mind to sit down, and wait for us to come around again."

"You don't say?" exclaimed Step Hen.

"How in the wide world would Bumpus ever guess it was *us* made the tracks?" Giraffe demanded, incredulously.

"He wouldn't have to guess, because he'd know!" Thad ventured.

"You must believe that fat chum of ours is waking up, Thad? Just tell us, will you now, how he'd be so dead sure of this? We haven't been dropping our visiting cards along the way, that I saw," and Step Hen gave Giraffe a sly wink.

"Well, we have, right along," Thad continued, "and unless I'm much mistaken, Bumpus can read the signs all right. He knows what kind of an imprint your shoes make, Step Hen, and how there's

a bunch of nails shaped like a star in both of your heels. Look down there, and you'll notice them."

"Well, I'll be jiggered if there ain't!" muttered the surprised Step Hen, as if the fact was quite new to him.

"And Giraffe, he also knows that you 'toe in' with your right foot, so that each time you step it makes a little peculiar scrape. Bend down and I'll show you, here, and here, and here. Catch on to it, now, Giraffe?"

"Well, I never knew that before; but it's a fact, Thad, I do turn that foot some, I admit. Tried to break off the habit lots of times, but it's no use."

"More than that," said Thad, "look at my track, and you'll see there's a marked peculiarity that makes it different from any other. I had a piece put on each heel, and the line shows as plain as anything. And now here's Allan's footprint—do you see anything about that you'd be likely to recognize if you ran across it again?"

"Sure we do," burst out Giraffe. "The shoe is square at the toes, broader than any other. Besides that, Allan walks with his feet nearly straight, and most people turn them out some; all but those that toe-in."

"Well, you see, now, that each one of us has an individual mark," continued the patrol leader, wishing to impress the lesson on the others.

"Yes, that's all right, Thad; but how would a tenderfoot like Bumpus know all about these things?" persisted Giraffe.

"How do *you* know?" demanded the leader.

"Huh! because you just told us, I guess," the tall scout admitted.

"Well, that's just the case with Bumpus," went on Thad. "Of late he's taken a remarkably deep interest in the thousand-and-one things that are open to the eyes of a scout, if only he chooses to look around. And so, when he asked about following a trail, I showed him how to tell the marks of every scout in the patrol, himself included. And Bumpus wrote them all down in that little note-book he carries."

"Well, if that don't beat all creation!" exclaimed Giraffe.

"Just imagine the poor boy squattin' down, to pull out his note-book, and then say: 'There, I know Giraffe made those tracks; and that other must be the manly tread of my good friend, Step Hen Bingham!' I guess it's up to us to improve

each shining hour, ourselves, Giraffe, like the busy little bee. We don't want a tenderfoot like Bumpus to beat us out, do we?"

"Not much we don't," said Giraffe.

And for three minutes the two of them were busily engaged writing descriptions in their scout's note-book, with which every one in the patrol was provided; stopping now and then to examine or measure one of the tracks.

When this operation was concluded, much to the amusement of Thad and Allan, the forward movement was again resumed.

But it seemed as though this little incident must have aroused the curiosity and ambition of Giraffe and Step Hen, for they frequently asked questions that had more or less bearing on trailing.

And the information which Allan was able to give, in addition to what the scoutmaster said, quite enthused both searchers after facts.

"Say, I never thought there was so much in this trackin' business," Step Hen honestly admitted. "I used to believe it was pretty much of a fake, and that fellers just kind of went along, smellin' out things, like a setter or a hound would. But now

I see it's a whole lot of fun; and I'm going in for trackin'. I am to be a champion trailer."

"Look out there, fellers!" shouted Giraffe.

They saw him swing his gun around, and almost immediately discharge the heavy rifle. All of the others hastened to get their guns in a serviceable condition, even while they were looking to see what had happened to excite the tall scout.

Something flashed from one tree to another, and vanished amidst the dense growth of leaves. As this tree was close to others, the chances were that the animal would have little difficulty in eluding them.

"Wow! a big wildcat!" exclaimed Step Hen, in great excitement.

"Tell me, did you see his left hind leg drag *just a little,* when he landed on that limb?" asked Giraffe, eagerly.

"Oh! you aimed to take him on the left hind leg, did you?" jeered Step Hen, advancing a pace in the hope of discovering the beast crouching above, and offering a fair target.

"I hadn't time to aim, but just shot any old way," declared the other. "Fact is, I don't believe the butt of my gun was more'n half way to my

shoulder when I let go. He was agoin' to jump right then, and I knew it was hit or miss with me."

"A dangerous thing to do when it's a lynx or a bob-cat," remarked Allan, who, being a Maine boy, had had lots of experience with the fierce beasts. "Better have let him get clean away. But I don't think you wounded him, Giraffe."

"Huh? why not?"

"Because I never knew a wildcat that was wounded to run away," Allan replied. "Once you give them pain, and you can make up your mind you've got a fight on your hands, and the chances are, a warm one too."

Giraffe looked disappointed.

"Well, I tried for him, anyway," he remarked. "Let's see if we can glimpse his old staring yellow eyes somewhere up there."

But they failed to do so.

"Make up your minds he's got clean off before now," said Allan. "The way one of those big cats can spring from tree to tree is fierce. But we haven't the time just now to be looking for cats. I don't believe we've lost any, do you, Thad?"

"But that old rascal seemed to be hanging on a limb just about over where our tenderfoot pard

must have passed by," ventured Giraffe, a new fear arising in his breast.

"Oh! my, I hope now he wasn't there when Bumpus came along," remarked Step Hen, as if comprehending the thought that had taken form in the mind of his comrade.

"What's this mean, Thad?" asked Allen, just then, pointing down close to his feet; and the other three uttered various exclamations when they saw what he was referring to.

"Spots of dried blood!" gasped Giraffe.

"It is, now, for a fact," Step Hen followed with, "Oh! that cat must have jumped on poor old Bumpus, and clawed him up something scandalous. He bled like a stuck pig, as he ran off. And see here, where something's been just dragging along the ground. What if he's wounded so bad he had to pull one leg after him? This is just awful, fellers. Poor old Bumpus!"

But Thad and Allan somehow did not seem to join with the others in feeling sorry. At least they made no remarks. And as they all walked slowly on, following the blood-stained tracks, if Giraffe or Step Hen, instead of keeping their eyes so closely upon the ground, had ventured to raise

them a little, so as to take in the faces of their chums, doubtless their surprise would have been great to notice that Thad wore a broad smile, while Allan was making various suggestive gestures, and winking one eye in the direction of the scoutmaster.

So they walked slowly forward a score or more of paces, when Giraffe and Step Hen were once more startled. This time it was not by the sudden appearance of a ferocious wild beast, but only the voice of Allan calling out:

"Oh! look! look! whatever can that be, hanging yonder from the limb of that tree?"

CHAPTER XI.

BUMPUS' STOCK ABOVE PAR.

"SAME old cat again!" burst out Giraffe; and he was in the act of raising his gun, to his shoulder this time, when Thad caught hold of it.

"Don't be silly, Giraffe!" cried the patrol leader.

"But—it *is* a cat!" exclaimed the other, rubbing his eyes with the knuckles of one hand, and looking again.

Meanwhile Step Hen had cautiously advanced a pace or two, staring at the dangling object as though he did not know whether to really believe his eyes or not.

Giraffe, seeing him going on, pushed to his side; and when the two of them came close to the object that had gripped their attention, they turned to exchange stares.

"A dead cat!" said Giraffe, solemnly.

"And hung up by the hind legs to that limb; now who could have done that?" demanded Step Hen.

"Must have been the same old critter that tackled our poor chum, Bumpus, back yonder.

Some friendly forest ranger just happened along in the nick of time, and used his rifle on the yowler. Here's where the bullet hit him, right in the heart," and Giraffe laid his finger on the wound.

"But say, here's where another caught him on the square head, and this hole shows where yet a third passed through his body. Why, he's been riddled, all shot to pieces, that's plain!" Step Hen declared, positively; and the other two listened, not wanting to break in just yet.

"Buckshot, not a rifle bullet ended this here cat, that's sure," said Giraffe.

"And say, Bumpus is carrying a two-shot Marlin scatter gun that uses buckshot cartridges!" went on Step Hen.

They looked at each other again, and then once more eyed the swinging trophy of *some one's* skill.

"But it's silly to think of *him* knockin' over a ferocious animal like this here cat," Giraffe ventured to say. "I never saw a bigger one; and he must have looked fierce enough, I tell you, when he was alive, and could arch up his back, and just growl in a way to make your blood run cold."

"H'm! s'pose you take a squint up to where the legs are tied to the limb of that tree, Giraffe?" suggested Step Hen, chuckling now with a new sense of humor.

The tall scout craned his long neck, the better to see.

"Jupiter! say, that does look like it, now," he admitted.

"That's what it is, sure enough," avowed Step Hen, "a piece cut from that rope Bumpus carries. You can see it's braided sash cord, and I'd know that old rope among a thousand. He done it, all right, Bumpus did!"

Giraffe whistled, to indicate the extent of his amazement.

"Who'd ever think he had it in him?" he observed, scratching his head as he stood there, and gazed at the dangling wildcat. "I reckon, now, he must a had the best luck ever, when he just shut his eyes and pulled trigger. This old cat must a wanted to commit suicide. P'raps he just climbed up and looked into the muzzle of Bumpus' gun."

"You know better'n that, Giraffe. He must have been some distance away, or else the buckshot wouldn't have scattered as much as it did. I reckon, now, our fat chum is improving a heap. That was a great shot."

"Good for you, Step Hen," Thad broke in to say. "And take another look at the cat, will you? Tell me if you see anything strange about him? I imagine the one Giraffe chased away was a mate to this, and must have been smelling at the body still, when we came up."

Step Hen uttered a little cry, and then remarked:

"Well, would you believe it, the old thing was a cripple. You can see he only had three paws. The aft fore paw is gone. Like as not it was bitten off in some fight he had long ago."

"You're wrong!" cried Giraffe, who had leaned forward to examine the injury at closer quarters. "That ain't any old hurt. The blood is as fresh as any of the rest, and I guess it only happened yesterday."

"Fine. Go on," declared Thad, and the tall scout, spurred on by that word of commendation, to exert himself to the utmost, was quick to continue.

"I can see that the paw wasn't bitten off, nor yet shot away," he remarked. "The cut is as clean as a whistle, and I reckon only a sharp hunting knife would do the job like that."

"But what would Bumpus want to go and hack a paw off the old cat for?" objected Step Hen.

"Why, for a trophy, silly," answered the other, quickly. "He just didn't know how to skin the beast, and hardly liked the job of toting it all around with him. So you see, to convince the rest of us that he'd really and truly knocked over a wildcat, he just took that paw along. How's that, Mr. Scoutmaster?"

"You hit the nail on the head that time, Giraffe," answered Thad, pleased at the way the other had figured things out, for it proved that, once

aroused to do his best, the tall scout possessed the ability required for reading "signs."

And this was one of the things that Thad Brewster, as acting head of the troop, always tried to impress upon the minds of the scouts under him. "Let every tub stand on its own bottom." "Learn to depend on yourself; do your own thinking; keep on the watch, and see all the wonderful things that are constantly happening around you in the great storehouse of Nature." "Be awake, active"—in a word, as the manual of the organization has it, "be prepared."

Giraffe and Step Hen had been tremendously staggered by the knowledge that the stout comrade, whom they always looked down on as a weakling, and called their "tenderfoot pard" with such a tone of patronage, seemed to be actually waking up, and doing things.

It was not enough that he exhibit the nerve to want to go out in search of a bear, all by himself. There was that episode of the muck bed for example—that sent Bumpus' stock up a few points above par. It revealed the fact that in an emergency the fat boy could actually *think for himself*.

Instead of allowing himself to get "rattled" after discovering that he was gripped fast in the tenacious mud, Bumpus had looked around him, and noticed that convenient limb above his head.

Of course he had stretched out his hands to-

ward it, but vainly, as they must have fallen short by two feet or more of reaching the limb. And then Bumpus remembered the fine rope he was carrying around his fat waist, under the conviction that it might come in handy some time or other.

Well, it did. Bumpus had drawn himself out of the mud, and up to the friendly limb of the tree; though it surely must have proven a most severe tax on his untrained muscles, he was such a heavy weight.

Giraffe admitted, deep down in his mind, that he could not have done any better himself.

And now, here was this same blundering, awkward Bumpus, actually knocking over a monstrous wildcat, one of the most ferocious animals roaming through the swamps adjoining the big timber belt.

It was commencing to dawn upon the minds of those two boys that, beginning right now, they would have to revise their opinion of Bumpus. He hardly seemed a fit candidate for the greenhorn grade of scout. Really, there seemed to be some class to this work he was putting up, that promised to raise him high up in the estimation of his comrades.

In fact, both of the boys who stood there, examining the hanging bob-cat, were beginning to wonder what next Bumpus would do.

"Seems to be another feller," remarked Step Hen.

"Right you are," replied Giraffe. "I never would have believed he had it in him. Biggest surprise ever. Gosh! Step Hen, after this, d'ye know, it wouldn't take much to make me expect bigger things."

"You mean——"

"That if he keeps on going at this warm pace, Bumpus might even get his old bear yet, who knows," Giraffe asserted.

Thad and Allan noticed with considerable amusement and satisfaction that the boys no longer alluded to the lost comrade as "poor old Bumpus," and "our tenderfoot pard." Their pity for the clumsy scout was fast changing into sincere admiration, respect. And surely Bumpus deserved it.

"A good lesson all around, eh Thad?" whispered Allan in the other's ear.

"Just what it is," was the scoutmaster's reply in the same low tone.

"Bumpus is learning to depend on himself," Allan went on.

"And these boys have been taught to be more careful how they allow themselves to feel so superior to a comrade who happens to be slower about waking up. They won't forget this in a hurry."

"Sure they won't," added Allan.

"Come, boys, let's be going on," Thad remarked, aloud. "I don't exactly like the looks of the sky over yonder where the breeze is coming out of."

These words of the scoutmaster caused Giraffe and Step Hen to turn and look back of them. So much engaged had they been in keeping tabs on the trail, and scanning the woods on either side for a possible glimpse of Bumpus, that neither of them had once bothered about looking at the heavens.

Hence a great surprise awaited them.

"Wow! did you ever see blacker clouds?" exclaimed Giraffe, apparently deeply impressed by what he had discovered.

"Looks like we might be in for a big storm," remarked Step Hen uneasily, for he never felt as brave as he might when the elements were battling with one another; but in order to disguise his timidity he added: "but then, as we ain't sugar or salt, I guess we won't melt."

As they hurried along through the timber, still following the plain trail left by the lost scout, it might have been noticed that Allan and Thad really looked more serious than the other pair. And there was a good reason for it, too.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SWOOP OF THE STORM.

"WHOO! she's coming right along, all right."

Step Hen volunteered this statement, when the first rumble of thunder was borne to their ears from the direction whence the storm was advancing.

"Hear that," added Giraffe, and then he went on: "I say, Thad, don't you think we'd better let up on this trail business, and hunt for a place where we might sit out the storm?"

"I'd just come to that conclusion myself," replied the other.

"And seems to me we hadn't ought to lose any too much valuable time in doing that," remarked Step Hen, starting a little when there came a flash of lightning, and later on another deep growl of thunder.

"Still three miles away; I counted between the flash and the thunder," announced Giraffe.

"Huh! three miles ain't a song when the old wind gets to blowing," declared Step Hen. "Notice that it's died out altogether now, fellers?"

"And getting pretty dark, too," Giraffe added. "Looks to me like we might be in for a little cyclone. Wonder if they ever have 'em up here, like they do in Kansas."

"Cyclone!" exclaimed Step Hen, "oh! my stars! and here we are without even a cyclone cellar."

"We'll try and find one," said Thad, encouragingly, for he had been keeping his eyes around him a long time back, noting the formation of the ground, and drawing his own conclusions.

They were no longer walking steadily on. Thad had increased his pace to a run, and his comrades kept at his side, as though determined not to be left in the lurch.

The sounds from the rear had gradually increased in volume. The thunder was louder, and more ominous, as each dazzling flash of lightning made the timber around them stand out most distinctly; although after it had passed, the semi-gloom seemed more appalling than ever.

And that other threatening sound, could it be the wind playing havoc with the tall trees? Thad had from time to time noticed that they came upon a windrow of fallen timber, all the trees lying in one direction. This circumstance had told him once that in a great while the region at the foot of the Rockies was visited by a destructive storm.

Might not this one prove to be such, and throw down more of these giants of the woods?

Thad had to bear this in mind, along with many other things. Surely, if the storm proved to be so severe that trees were going to be uprooted and blown down, they wanted to be out of danger.

Step Hen was getting more and more excited.

He always felt this way, even at home, when the air was charged with electricity. Many a time he could remember walking up and down a room, like a tiger in its cage, while the elements were holding high carnival without.

And while he believed that the scoutmaster would do all that lay in his power to get himself and comrades into some sort of shelter before the threatening storm broke over their heads, Step Hen saw no reason why he should not assist, as far as he could.

So he kept those sharp eyes of his on the constant watch, as he ran along at the side of the pacemaker.

Suddenly Step Hen gave a triumphant shout.

"Oh! look! look! here's a good place for us to crawl in," and he pointed to one side as he spoke.

There, as another bright flash lighted up the gloomy forest, Thad saw an enormous tree, easily the king of them all. Doubtless it out topped all its comrades, rearing its lofty head far above the best of them.

And yet old age had started in to demolish the monarch of the woods, beginning at the butt instead of the top. The giant tree was hollow. There yawned an aperture, surely large enough to hold the four scouts easily, if they chose to huddle together.

"And the hole is pretty well away from the track of the storm, so the rain ain't agoin' to beat in on us," Step Hen went on.

"Do we crawl in, Thad?" asked Giraffe, showing by his manner that he was only too willing to comply, if the scoutmaster said the word.

But Thad and Allan exchanged a look, and each shook his head.

"No tree for mine in a storm like this, come on boys;" called out the patrol leader, once more starting on a run.

Step Hen hesitated. It even seemed as though the spirit of finding safety was tempting him to hold back. If he thought Giraffe would back him up, Step Hen might possibly have declined to leave the big hollow tree that looked so inviting to him.

But Giraffe, either more submissive to authority just then, or else not quite so frightened by the crash of the approaching storm, was already hurrying after the leader.

And so Step Hen went on, although grumblingly.

"Why couldn't we use that nice, old hiding-place,

Thad?" he called out; for the thunder, together with the roar of the wind, and the rain, in their rear, made so much racket, that talking in ordinary tones was impossible.

"That tree might go down with a crash in the gale," was what Thad said over his shoulder, as he ran.

"Well, p'raps that's so," admitted Step Hen.

"And worse than that, it was liable to be struck by lightning," added the young scoutmaster. "Nearly always picks out the tallest tree, or one standing alone. You never want to get under a tree in a thunderstorm, remember that, Step Hen. Better lie down flat on the ground, and take your soaking."

And even though the advice was shouted at him under such peculiar conditions, Step Hen was apt to remember it. Indeed, those very conditions served to impress it indelibly on his mind. He would never again hear the crash of thunder, and see the vivid flash of lightning without remembering what Thad had said.

And every boy should do the same; for what does a wetting amount to, beside the peril of sudden death? Every day during the summer there can be found brief accounts of men or boys killed by lightning, because they took refuge under a tree, when a storm interrupted their work in the harvest field.

During an ordinary shower a tree may be an acceptable shelter, but never when the air is surcharged with electricity; since it serves as a conductor to draw the lightning.

"But what are we agoin' to do?"

It was Giraffe who broke out with this appeal, shortly after they left the neighborhood of the hollow tree that had so tempted Step Hen.

Up to this point the tall scout had been blindly following Thad's lead. The quality of obedience was plainly well developed in Giraffe. But now his curiosity seemed to get the better of these other traits in his character. Although he did not come from Missouri, and in fact had never seen the sacred soil of that grand state, still Giraffe "wanted to know."

Nor did Thad seem to take it amiss in a comrade asking such a natural question, under the circumstances.

He was always willing to volunteer information.

"Got an idea we ought to find some ledges on the other side of this little rocky knob hill on the left," he called out.

"Oh," said Step Hen.

That was the extent of his remarks, and for several reasons. In the first place he had considerable confidence in Thad's sagacity, for he had seen it successfully tried under many conditions; and what the other suggested appealed to Step Hen

as reasonable. Then again, he was short of breath, and needed all he possessed in order to keep running along with the others.

Step Hen and Giraffe kept pretty well up in the van. Now and then, when a particularly fearful flash came they would turn part way around, as if the fascination of that on-coming tempest were too much for them.

And sometimes either one would give utterance to an excited whoop when the timber was lighted up by an unusually dazzling flash, though the cry was sure to be immediately deadened by the reverberating thunder.

They also noticed with some degree of satisfaction, that they were even then rounding the low rocky elevation. Unless Thad had made a sad mistake in his judgment, they should know the facts before another minute passed.

But so rapidly was the storm coming along now, that apparently they would have none too generous an allowance of time.

With the rush of the wind another sound began to be heard that was quite disconcerting. This was a frequent crash, such as even Giraffe and Step Hen knew must accompany the fall of trees.

They were glad on this account, if for no other, that Thad had led them by degrees out of the big timber, so that they now skirted the base of the

singular little rocky elevation that was almost devoid of trees.

The thought of being in constant danger of having one of those giants topple over upon their heads, was far from pleasant.

Between the flashes it had become oppressively dark, so much so that the boys had to be more careful where they set their feet. But with all that turmoil of shrieking winds, crash of falling trees, and roar of thunder, chasing along in their rear, and rapidly overtaking them, it was little wonder that at times they made mistakes in where they stepped.

And presently, what Thad had been fearing came to pass, when Step Hen shouted out at the top of his voice:

"Hold up, Thad, Giraffe's taken a tumble; and I reckon he's some hurt!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOLT OF LIGHTNING.

In the midst of such a confusion of dreadful sounds, and knowing that in another minute or so they would be overtaken by the storm, it was little wonder that Thad's heart seemed to feel a cold clutch when Step Hen burst out with that announcement.

What if Giraffe had broken a leg in taking this tumble? He was that tall, and possessed such "spindle legs," as the boys always called them, that they often joked him on the probability of his cracking a bone when he slid to second base.

And it was in dreadful fear, then, that the scoutmaster halted, to turn hastily around.

To his satisfaction he saw that Giraffe, helped by Step Hen, was already scrambling to his feet, although limping some.

"All right, Giraffe?" called out Thad.

"On deck; go ahead!" came the cheery reply.

And shutting his teeth hard together, Giraffe managed to once more start on a run after his

chief, though his bruised leg must have hurt him considerably.

They were now turning the side of the rocky elevation. And just as Thad had said, it seemed to be made up of little ledges, one above the other This was not a mere guess on Thad's part, for he had noticed the same peculiar formation in connection with several other outcroppings they had passed, these being off-shoots of the foothills at the base of the Rocky Mountains

And so, again did that policy of observation, "noticing things" promise to prove of great assistance to the fugitive scouts when chased by the storm. It often does, and the boy who keeps his eyes about him under any and all circumstances, is the one who reaps the profit. There is never an emergency arises but he is ready with some remedy to meet it.

When they saw these friendly ledges the other boys realized that for the time being their troubles were about at an end.

There would be plenty of chances for them to find shelter here. Thad did not accept of the very first refuge that offered, because he knew there was still a little more time at their disposal, and he had an idea they would presently come upon a ledge capable of covering them all.

It turned out just as he figured.

When the four crept under the outcropping shelf

of rock, they found that they had no longer any need to fear the violence of the gale.

The lightning could not well reach them here, the wind was powerless to do them any harm; there were no threatening trees to topple over upon their heads; and as for the rain, it would sweep past, and leave them perfectly dry.

No wonder then, that Step Hen, in the sudden change of his feelings from dark despair to complete satisfaction, gave vent to a scout whoop; while Giraffe, equally pleased, uttered several fox barks, that being the distinguishing signal of the patrol, by which members would recognize each other if approaching in the dark.

"This is something like!" cried Step Hen, in between the thunder claps.

"As comfy as if we were at home," added Giraffe, who was sitting there, gingerly rubbing his bruised shin.

A tremendous crash made further talk just then out of the question. And it seemed as though that thunder clap might have been the signal that the stage was all set, and the war of the elements could begin.

The wind started in with a furious rush that snapped off several trees not far away from where the four scouts huddled under their shelter. These came crashing down, as though loudly protesting against their untimely fate. But the sound of their

fall was really swallowed up in all the other mad noises that marked the first rush of the summer storm.

How the wind did whistle through the tops of the trees, that bent before its fury, together with the downpour of rain. The ones that could prove most humble, and bow their proud heads, best, were those that came out of the turmoil with the least damage. The trees could adapt themselves to circumstances, the scouts saw; and surely there was another lesson for them all in that.

After a furious rush, the storm slackened up a little, as though gathering force for a fresh outburst, perhaps more strenuous than before.

But this little breathing spell afforded the boys a chance to exchange a few remarks, since it is at all times a difficult task to keep their tongues from wagging.

"That was a swift one, all right!" Giraffe burst out with.

"Did you ever hear such thunder?" said Allan.

"And the lightning—oh! my stars! it just made me blink, and shiver every time it flashed," declared Step Hen.

"Well, the worst is yet to come!" announced Thad, seriously.

"He's joking," cried out Step Hen.

"No, I'm not," the scoutmaster went on. "I've always noticed that when a storm lets up like this,

it generally hits harder the next spell. And you'll find out, if you wait a minute, for it's coming again."

"But we're all right here, ain't we?" asked Giraffe.

"Sure," replied the other, "unless it turns around."

"Turns around!" ejaculated Step Hen. "D'ye mean to say that old wind could take a kink in itself, and come back on us?"

"It often happens during a storm. In the beginning it may beat down on you from the east, and finish up in the southwest. But I guess the second half of this one is coming out of the same quarter as the first."

"Good for that!" exclaimed Step Hen. "We're all so cozy under here, I'd hate to have the wind drive that wet rain in on us. There she comes, boys. Whew! say, listen to that, would you? I hope that thunder don't start the rocks to rolling down this slope."

"No danger of that," called out Thad, for with the return of the furious bombardment talking was becoming more difficult.

Just as the scout leader had said it, it really did look as though this second half of the storm promised to be more violent than the one that had gone booming along its way. It seemed to the boys that

some of the thunder claps would split their ear drums, so powerful did they appear.

The rain again fell in torrents, too. They could hear it rushing furiously down the side of the little rocky hill. Several spouts shot over the outcropping ledge that served as their roof; but despite it all, none of them so much as had a sprinkle fall upon him.

Never had the wisdom and sagacity of the scoutmaster been more amply proven than right then. And doubtless each of the other three boys must have been secretly saying as much, as they crouched there, gazing in speechless wonder and awe at the curious freaks shown by the zigzag forked lightning, every time it came down from the black vault above, or played tag among the piled up masses of clouds that were slowly retreating.

Apparently the worst was over.

Even then doubtless there was a break in the van of the storm clouds. Furious though the tempest had been, it was to prove of short duration. But while it lasted Thad reckoned that it was about as tropical in its nature as any he had ever encountered.

"Glad it's going!" called out Giraffe.

"It never will be missed," sang Step Hen, feeling particularly joyous over the fact that after all they had come through it all unscathed.

"The rain's stopped, that's sure," Giraffe asserted.

"And that means the danger's over. We can go out now, when we please," Step Hen remarked, making a movement as if to rise.

"Hold on, I wouldn't do that yet," exclaimed Thad.

"Why not?" asked Step Hen, but at the same time falling back.

"There's a lot of dangerous electricity in the air still," said Thad. "You can see that the reports after each flash are as quick and powerful as if a twelve-inch gun on a battleship were being fired. Every bolt strikes just after a storm has passed. Lots of people say the back action is the most dangerous time of all.

"Oh! all right, Thad. Guess I'll stay awhile longer. No need of a feller takin' more chances than he has to," and Step Hen settled down again; for if there was any danger of being struck by lightning, no one would find him careless.

"But this is the end, ain't it, Thad?" asked Giraffe, still rubbing at his leg.

"I reckon it is," replied the patrol leader.

"Wonder how our fellers in camp stood the racket. Hope the tents didn't get blown away," Step Hen remarked.

"And Bumpus, I reckon he'll be put to his wit's ends to know what to do at such a time as this,"

but Thad noticed that when he said it, Giraffe really betrayed an undercurrent of respect in his manner.

Bumpus was no longer a complete ignoramus; Bumpus had raised himself wonderfully in the estimation of his chums.

Just then there was an unusually brilliant flash. The thunder seemed to really accompany it, showing that the bolt struck near at hand.

"Wow! that hit something, as sure as you live!" exclaimed Giraffe.

"Thought I heard branches crashing down, and I reckon it must have been a tree," remarked Step Hen, who had given a nervous jump at the brilliant and dazzling illumination.

"It *did* shatter a tree, and over in the very place we came from, too. To tell you the truth, fellows, it wouldn't surprise me one bit if it was that same big tree that had so splendid a hollow in its butt."

Step Hen turned very white when he heard Thad say this, and a painful silence fell upon the little group of scouts under the friendly ledge.

CHAPTER XIV.

STEP HEN LOOKS OUT FOR THE PROVISIONS.

Some little time passed. Gradually the storm was passing away in the distance, where they could still hear the constant growl and mutter of the thunder. But those near-by crashes had really ceased.

As the boys were cramped, and becoming restless, Thad saw no reason why they should not get out in the open again.

"First, I want to look at that leg of yours, Giraffe," said the scoutmaster.

"Aw! guess I'll manage all right," replied the other, his pride revolting at such a thing as showing the white feather.

"All the same, it ought to be looked after," persisted Thad. "We can't afford to take any chances of your being lamed. A stiff leg is a constant bother. And there's no need of it when I've got liniment and salve and linen in my haversack, for just such uses. Here, roll up the leg of your trousers and let Doc Thad take a look. No nonsense, now, Giraffe. It's orders."

So, protesting still that it "didn't amount to a row of pins," Giraffe nevertheless obeyed the injunction of the patrol leader.

"There, it is quite an ugly wound, and bleeding too," declared Thad. "And you might have had a heap of trouble with that same hurt, Giraffe, if you didn't let me put some salve on. It's an open cut and the liniment would bite too much. Besides this healing salve is better."

And so Thad soon had a nice bandage fastened snugly about the hurt. Giraffe frankly admitted that it did feel soothed by the application, though he still had to limp more or less when he walked, naturally favoring the lame leg.

"Now we can go ahead again, and find old Bumpus," Step Hen remarked, after the operation had been successfully finished.

"That's the worst of it all," said Allan, with a disconsolate shrug of his shoulders, and making a wry face at the same time.

"Worst of what?" demanded Step Hen. "Ain't we going to pick up the trail at the place we lost it, or back where the old cat hangs?"

"There isn't any trail!" Allan replied.

"What?" ejaculated both Step Hen and Giraffe, amazed by his declaration, that filled them with dismay.

"The rain washed it all out, you see," Allan went on to explain.

"But—how are we agoin' to find Bumpus, then?" Step Hen gasped.

Again the Maine boy shrugged his shoulders, and there was something very expressive about the movement.

"Ask me something easy, please? I confess I'm all up in the air. I don't know how we can find our chum, unless by an accident, later on, we came upon his fresh trail again, made after the storm. And that's supposing a good many things, you see, one of which is that he's come out of the racket safe and sound."

"Whew! strikes me we've got as much chance of runing across him as we'd have finding a needle in a haystack," ventured Giraffe.

"Just about as much," Allan replied, looking downcast.

As long as there was any trail to find, Allan was not the one to give up; he would hang on tenaciously while a shred of hope remained. But with the tracks of Bumpus positively washed out by the downpour from the clouds, it was useless wasting time in looking for any "signs."

Even Thad seemed serious now.

Troubles were accumulating thick and fast, for the missing member of the Silver Fox Patrol. Though thus far Bumpus seemed to have surmounted his trials and difficulties, he might have been caught unawares by that furious storm. And

what if he had been tempted to seek shelter in a hollow tree, not having a wise scoutmaster handy, to warn against the evil of such a thing? Giraffe and Step Hen felt very uneasy at even the thought.

They left the vicinity of the ledges, and once more entered the tall timber. But the others knew that Thad was indulging in no hope that they could discover any signs of the trail, or follow it, even though an occasional footprint remained. He had some other purpose in leading them backward, and they could hazard a pretty good guess as to what it might be.

There were abundant signs of the storm's passage all around them. Some of the more slender trees still bowed their heads in the direction where, far away in the distance, the thunder still growled and muttered. Here and there the boys could see one that had been uprooted, and either thrown flat to the ground, or else received in the sheltering embrace of some neighbor, that held it in a half reclining attitude.

And presently Giraffe gave vent to a loud cry.

"It *did* strike Step Hen's tree!" he exclaimed.

"Where is it? I don't see the same;" demanded Step Hen.

"Look again. Rub your eyes, and wake up! Don't you glimpse that pile of branches over there, scattered in every direction?" asked Giraffe.

"Sure I do," admitted the other, "but how

d'ye know now that wreckage came from my tree?"

"Why, that's easy," replied Giraffe. "Notice that shattered trunk partly standing yet? Well, step this way and you can see where part, only part, mind you, Step Hen, is left of that hiding-place you wanted to crawl in."

"Oh! my stars!" ejaculated the other scout, when his staring eyes told him that what his comrade said was the awful truth.

It had been the luckiest escape those four boys would ever know. They felt a great awe steal over them, accompanied by a sensation of thanksgiving, as they stood there looking at the ruin of that once proud king of the woods.

"None of us would ever know what hit us, I guess," said Step Hen, finally.

"And I reckon I've learned my lesson all right," added the tall scout. "Just as Thad said, what's a ducking, when you think of taking chances with a thing like this? I am for a wetting down, every time, after this."

"But what had we better do—head back for camp, and give our poor old chum Bumpus up for good?" asked Step Hen, dejectedly.

"Not just yet," the scoutmaster replied.

"We've got some grub still," suggested Giraffe, "and can make fires all right, no matter how wet the wood got."

"Yes, we can stay out for another day or two," said Thad, "and longer than that, if we think there's any chance of finding him; because we could knock over some game at the worst."

"But what's the programme?" persisted Giraffe. "Are we going to lay out some sort of plan, and then follow it up; or just go meanderin' around, every-which-way, trusting to sheer luck?"

"We'll try and figure on what Bumpus was most likely to do," said Thad, "and then pattern our plan after that. And later on, you know, we could give a shout once in a while. If he was near enough to us he might hear us that way."

"You're right, Thad, and it's a good scheme," declared Giraffe.

"A dandy one," added Step Hen. "And if ever Bumpus hears me ashoutin' he'll know who 'tis, all right."

"I should say, yes," Giraffe observed, with such a meaning look that the other took umbrage at once, and flamed out with:

"'Tain't any more like the caw of a crow than your squawk is, Giraffe, and you know it, even if you used to say so. That's because you was envious because, outside of Bumpus himself, I could sing better'n any other scout in the whole troop."

Giraffe made no answer to this taunt. He only looked appealing toward Thad, as much as to say that he was not to blame for this flare-up.

They walked on for a while, although the going was not so very pleasant, owing to the fact that the bushes were all so wet, they had to avoid contact with them.

Allan and Thad conferred as they went, and apparently must have laid out their plans, for the others presently became aware of the fact that they seemed to be moving ahead in something like a direct line.

Although they had thus far met with no great success, Step Hen and Giraffe still felt considerable confidence in their leaders. Thad and Allan seemed so able to cope with anything and everything that came along, it was no wonder the others had begun to believe they could accomplish the impossible.

But when the afternoon waned, and another night stared them in the face, they had to temporarily forget about Bumpus, and consider their own condition.

A fire would certainly be needed, for everything around them was still wet; and as the droppings from the trees had partly soaked their garments, Thad thought they must dry out.

But a piece of luck came their way about this time that was as welcome as it was unexpected.

Step Hen happened to be out on the left flank, and suddenly the others heard the report of his rifle in that quarter. As they hastily turned that

way, it was to see Step Hen dancing madly up and down.

"I got it! I got it!" he was shouting, clawing at his little repeating rifle in the endeavor to work the pump action, and render it serviceable again.

"Got what?" demanded Giraffe, running up.

"A deer!" replied the other.

"Yes, you have. Tell us where?" asked the tall scout, incredulously.

"Over back of them bushes. It was just going to jump when I let go. Guess it dropped in its tracks!" panted Step Hen.

Giraffe gave a mocking laugh.

"We'll soon see if you put a flim-flam bullet into an old stump," he remarked, derisively, limping forward; and immediately shouting: "Well, of all the world, if he didn't get the nicest little buck you ever saw; and shot straight through the heart. No wonder he went down ker-flop. Step Hen, you're going some. I'll have to look out, or else you'll be crowding at my heels."

"Beat that snapshot if you can, Giraffe," said the other, proudly looking down at his quarry.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH THE BIG TIMBER AGAIN.

THAT night the boys feasted.

After being without fresh meat for some little time now, that venison certainly did taste prime. And no doubt it was doubly sweet to Step Hen, who had made the best shot of his life when he brought the game down.

At least they need no longer think of being compelled to return to the camp near the foot of the noisy rapids, on account of a lack of food. They could go a number of days, subsisting on the new supply that had stocked up their almost exhausted larder so handsomely.

But there was a weight resting on all of them. They talked some, but most of the time after supper they sat there, looking into the comfortable blaze, and busy with their thoughts.

What these were, as a rule, might be gathered from a remark made by Step Hen.

"It was a good supper, all right, and that deer

meat went just prime. Only wish *he's* got as good to-night."

And no one asked him who he meant. No doubt every one of the four around the fire had Bumpus in mind right then and there.

"And we're going to keep this fire burning through the live-long night, too," said Thad, later on, when there was some talk of going to sleep.

"Regardless of Hank and Pierre, eh?" asked Giraffe, his eyes brightening; for he never liked to see a camp-fire go out; it was always as solemn a ceremony in his mind as the passing of a dear friend would be.

"Oh! like as not they're miles and miles away from here," Thad went on to say. "And anyhow, one of us at a time will be on guard all night. If he hears a shot or a distant shout be sure to call me up, whoever he may be."

And that, then, was the programme laid down. They would do everything in their power to attract the attention of the wandering Bumpus, in case he happened to be anywhere in the neighborhood.

But it was all of no avail.

Doubtless one or the other of the scouts, when standing his turn as sentry, may have fancied he heard far-away hails, because the wish was father to the thought; but upon listening, to make doubly sure before arousing the others, it had invariably

turned out that the sound was an owl calling to his mate in the depth of the big timber, or the strange cry of the night hawk abroad seeking food.

But all the live-long night that watch-fire continued to burn, although without any result.

The boys went about their duties in the morning, a litle crestfallen; and yet they had no reason to reproach themselves, having done everything in their power to win success.

As they ate breakfast they tried to lay out the day's campaign. Enough of the fresh venison was to be carried along to provide several meals. And as they went, they meant to let out a few shouts at intervals.

Of course they knew that, just as one of them, Giraffe, had said before, it was about as satisfactory as searching for a needle in a haystack. But it was the best they could do. And boys as a rule, are very prone to put considerable confidence in what they call "luck."

After the violent storm there was one good result, at least; the air was as sweet and pure and invigorating as any of them could wish. Indeed, Thad, as he glanced around and above him, when they stopped once that morning to rest, thought he had never seen a lovelier picture. And only for this weight resting so heavily upon his soul, in connection with the fate of the missing tenderfoot, he could have enjoyed it immensely.

The sky was the bluest of the blue, with here and there a fleecy white cloud floating across it. Away up could be seen a pair of eagles sailing in immense circles, and able to look directly into the face of the sun.

Lower down a number of other large birds were floating around, and it looked as though they might be centering over a certain spot. Thad recognized them as buzzards, those scavengers of the wilds that are protected by law in most sections of the country, because of their usefulness in disposing of carrion that might otherwise breed an epidemic of disease.

On one side glimpses could occasionally be had of the lofty mountains, to explore which had been one of the excuses the scouts had for making such a long journey.

Apparently the other boys were also looking around them, for presently Step Hen, pointing with his finger, said:

"What are those birds away up there, Thad?"

"The ones up in the clouds, you mean, I suppose?" asked the other.

"Yes," replied Step Hen.

"That is the majestic eagle, my son," said Giraffe, pompously.

"Majestic humbug," laughed Allan.

"But they represent the American nation," objected Giraffe, "every time the papers get talkin'

about trouble with foreign nations they say 'now listen to the eagle scream' don't they?"

"Oh! it can scream, all right, and fight right hard, I admit, when it has to," Allan went on to say, "but all this talk about the eagle being such a *noble* bird makes me weary. If you'd watched him as often as I have, sitting lazily on the limb of a dead tree, and waiting till some poor, industrious fish hawk makes a haul, so he could rob him, you wouldn't have quite so much respect for the magnificent bird as you do now."

"Huh! p'raps not," grunted Giraffe, looking crestfallen. "Honest to goodness now, I always did think the old feller couldn't live up to his reputation. Guess America had ought to hunt up another emblem besides the eagle."

"But say, them others ain't eagles, I know," spoke up Step Hen.

"No, they are the despised buzzard, that everybody shuns, yet no one kills, for he'd be far worse to eat than crow," said Thad.

"And yet a ten times more useful bird than the eagle, which lives upon its ill-gotten reputation, and as I said before, the labor of the osprey, or fish-hawk," Allan went on to remark.

"But see 'em circle around, would you, Thad," Step Hen kept on. "They generally do that, don't they, when they've discovered something worth while?"

Step Hen did not wholly voice the terrible fear that had suddenly gripped his heart in a sickening clutch. There was no need, for every one of the other scouts had a spasm along the same lines.

They looked at each other rather guiltily. An undefined fear was written large upon each paling countenance. Thad, however, was the first to recover.

"You gave me an uneasy minute with the suggestion your words conjured up, Step Hen," he said, firmly; "but I just can't force myself to believe there's anything to it."

"But, Thad——"

"Just hold on, Step Hen," the patrol leader went on to remark, "I understand what you mean, and of course we'll head that way, to make sure it's a deer, or something like that."

None of them cared to pursue the matter any further, as they walked along, keeping one eye aloft to note the position of the buzzards that sailed around and around, constantly dropping lower, and with the other taking stock of their surroundings.

Thad smiled after a while, but he did not take the trouble to communicate what was in his mind to the others.

"They'll know soon enough," he was saying to himself, "let them find it out for themselves."

Allan was the first to make a discovery. He threw a quick, knowing look in the direction of the

scoutmaster, who answered with a nod and a smile.

Pretty soon Giraffe began to smell a rat.

"Well, I declare," he remarked, "seems like I've set eyes before on that there queer old tree with the big hump on its trunk. Can't be possible there could be another just like that anywhere this side the Rockies."

No one saying anything, Giraffe went on to remark:

"Yes sir, it's the same identical tree, I'd take my affidavy on that. See here's where I sliced off a bit of the bark with my hatchet, as we went along. Now, ain't that funny, we've made a grand circle ourselves, just like we thought he'd *do;* and crossed our own trail right here."

"Have you any idea where this tree is, Giraffe?" asked Thad, meaning to test the memory of the observing scout.

"Let's see, when was it I noticed the same?" and Giraffe frowned with the effort to whip his memory. "Oh! yes, sure, I recollect it all now. Why, you see Thad, it was just after we'd left that place where Bumpus had hung up that dead cat."

"Wow! there it hangs right now; and yes, as sure as you live, the wind brings us a whiff of it, too!" cried Step Hen. "Say, Thad, was *this* what

the buzzards scented far off, and gathered here to make their dinner off?"

"Just what it was, and they're welcome, for all of me," replied the patrol leader; evidently greatly relieved over something. "But come on, boys, we're going to start on a new track from here, one we haven't been over yet. I'm in hopes we may have the great good luck to learn something about our chum, before we make another grand circuit. My first guess didn't pan out very well."

None of them were sorry to leave the neighborhood of the dead cat, which Bumpus had hung up in the tree, possibly in the hope of sometime claiming its well-riddled pelt.

An hour later they were making their way through a particularly bad stretch of woodland, where the brush was dense in places, and many trees, fallen years upon years ago, forced the scouts to either clamber over, or go around.

Step Hen was just in the act of jumping over the half-rotten trunk of one of these fallen forest monarchs, when the rest heard him give utterance to a loud whoop, immediately followed by words that struck a chill to their very hearts:

"Thad! Allan! come here, quick! I'm snake bit, and I reckon it was a big rattler that grabbed me by the leg!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SNAKE BITE.

"WHAT can we do, Thad?" exclaimed Giraffe, as with the others he hurried over in the direction of Step Hen's voice.

Step Hen had not kept exactly with his mates; had he done so the trouble that was now upon him might not have happened. Encouraged by his success of the preceding day, when he had secured a fine deer just because he hung upon the flank of the advancing party, Step Hen had wandered far afield again, though careful, after a fashion, never to lose sight of the rest.

It was easy to understand, under the circumstances, how the ambitious Nimrod kept his eyes about him, looking for a possible deer to jump up and bound away. He had not been thinking of snakes at all, when so recklessly jumping over the dead tree; and this is always a more or less dangerous thing to do in a country where poisonous snakes may be found.

They came upon the frightened Step Hen. He

was down on one knee, and with hands that trembled so he could hardly work, was trying to roll up one of his trousers' legs, after having kicked off his canvas legging.

Thad was instantly at his side.

"Let me do that for you, Step Hen," he exclaimed, as he dropped his gun, and applied himself to the task, to cry out a few seconds later, "I don't see any marks where his fangs went in. Where was it he struck you? Oh! that red spot? Wait a minute."

Thad, to the astonishment of the injured lad, whipped out a small magnifying glass, with which he was in the habit of examining beetles, and all sorts of things of a like nature, in whose habits he, as an amateur naturalist, chanced to be interested.

This he applied to the red mark, examining the same closely.

"I can see two sets of little punctures, one above and one below," he announced presently.

"That's them!" exclaimed Step Hen. "Oh! he jumped right at me, and bit me, all right! I was that scared I could hardly move. I hate snakes, you know, the worst kind. Thad, tell me, did anybody ever get bit by a rattler, and live? My goodness! will you have to cut my leg off, to save me? Oh! I think I'd rather die right now, than have to hop around on one leg all my life. Do something

for me, Thad; what are you grinning at, Giraffe? This is a mighty serious matter, I tell you."

"Keep still!" said Thad, sternly.

Then he got down, and sucked at the tiny wounds with all his might, having first made sure that he had no cut, or abrasion of the skin about his lips, or the interior of his mouth. Having expectorated freely Thad got up again. Step Hen followed his every movement with a troubled look on his face.

"Think you got all the old poison out, Thad? Oh! let somebody else have a try, won't you? Can't afford to take any chances about this. Think what an awful blow it'd be to my folks if I skipped off right here and now. Ketch me a jumpin' over a log again without first lookin'. Where's my gun? Did anybody see my gun? Goodness knows where it went. I bet that snake went and carried—oh! thank you, Allan, there's the little dandy, all right. But Thad, don't it look like my leg's beginning to swell? I just seem to feel it twitching all the time. Is that the poison going through my system? Oh! I just knew some day a measly old snake'd get me. How I hate 'em."

"Keep still!" commanded the scoutmaster, sternly.

"Oh! all right, Thad. I'm sure you'll do the right thing by me; but it's just awful to know you've been bitten by a rattlesnake."

"In the first place, I don't believe it *was* a rattlesnake!" said Thad, positively.

"But it was an *awful* big, wicked looking snake, Thad; and if you'd seen the way it jumped at me——" began Step Hen.

"That's one of the reasons I had for saying what I did," Thad went on, "a rattlesnake never attacks any one, or any enemy. It always throws itself into a coil, and with head erect, and tail rattling a warning 'don't tread on me,' waits to be attacked. This rule has no exception. A rattlesnake is almost helpless out of coil, and the very first thing he does is to curl up. He may lunge so hard at something as to throw himself half way out of coil; but as quick as a flash he's back again, for he's afraid something will get him.

"Oh! is that so, Thad?" exclaimed Step Hen, still keeping one anxious eye on his bare leg, as though he half expected to see it begin to puff up visibly before his very eyes.

"Was this snake coiled when you first saw it?" demanded Thad.

"N—no."

"What was it doing then, Step Hen?"

"I reckon it was crawlin' along—yes, I know it was, because I remember how I got a fierce jolt when I was just going over the log, to see it with its old head raised, and showing its teeth."

"And then it jumped at you?" Thad continued.

"And tried to wrap around me, after it bit me through my legging; but I guess I kicked some, because it dropped off, and ran away."

Thad smiled.

"I'm sure now it was not a rattler," he said. "No doubt it may have been a big black snake. They're as fierce as they make them, and can whip a sluggish rattler every time, but they're not poisonous at all, Step Hen."

"Oh! I hope then it was a black snake!" exclaimed the other scout, with a sigh.

"Another thing," said Thad, wishing to make it conclusive, so Step Hen might not keep on worrying about the affair. "A black snake bites, but as a general rule a rattlesnake opens his jaws until they stand almost perpendicular, so that he can lay bare his poison fangs. He sinks these two hollow teeth into his enemy, with a furious blow, and at the same time injects the poison. There is no known *sure* remedy for a rattlesnake's poison. But this snake tried to bite you. There are the faint marks of teeth belonging to both the upper and the lower jaw. It's all right, Step Hen; you're in no danger. The poison would have begun to work before now, if it was there."

"But you won't take any chances, will you, Thad?" asked the other.

"I didn't. I sucked just as hard as if I thought

you were going to swell up, and have your heart affected," said Thad.

"But to make sure, Thad, suppose you paint my leg with some of that purple stuff you carry with you," pleaded Step Hen.

"Oh! you mean that solution of permanganate of potash," replied the other.

"Yes, that's the stuff."

"But," objected Thad, "it's meant for scratches from the claws of carnivorous animals, so as to neutralize the virus that is apt to get in the blood, and give blood poisoning."

"Well, here's some poison it can get in its little work on," Step Hen insisted.

"But it will hurt like sixty."

"Let her hurt. The more the better; because then I know it'll be doing its work. Come, let's have it, Thad."

Knowing how persistent Step Hen could be when he wanted to, the scoutmaster felt that he must comply with his request. It could do no harm, and at least would make the boy feel easier in his mind.

"Gee! don't it darken things up some," Step Hen declared, a little later, when the application had been made.

"It stains a whole lot," admitted Thad.

"Huh! I've got one thing to be thankful for anyhow," Step Hen remarked.

"Lots of 'em, my boy," laughed Thad. "But what do you mean in particular?"

"I'm glad he pinched me on the leg," the other went on, whimsically. "Think if he'd jumped up and dented my nose, and you had to paint it like that! My stars! mebbe I wouldn't be a sight though."

"You'd sure never a been able to go back to Cranford," declared Giraffe, who had been an interested observer of all that went on. "Because they'd all say you'd taken to drink."

"Huh! nothing funny about that, because I've been drinking all my life," the other answered back.

"Does it hurt?" asked Thad.

"Well, I guess, yes," replied Step Hen, making a grimace; "but then, I want it to just gouge me. Go it, you little gripper; hope you counteract every drop of poison. That's it, hit me up again. Whew! that's going some."

"Now there are two of us," remarked Giraffe, as he vied with Step Hen in seeing which could limp the most. "It's your right leg, and my left one; so we've still got a decent pair between us."

"But they ain't mates, by a long shot," declared Step Hen.

Joking in this way they followed after Thad and Allan. But as the morning was nearly done it was decided to make camp long enough to have a bite.

Again they talked of Bumpus and his affairs, as they sat around the fire, and ate.

Step Hen hoped that the fat scout would not have the misfortune to run across a "fighting snake," such as the one that had thrown him into such a panic.

"Because, you see," he went on, "not knowing any better, the poor feller would think it was a rattler, instead of just a plain, every day black snake. And it w'd give him no end of worry, because he couldn't suck the wound himself, being no contortionist like Davy Jones; and he wouldn't have Thad and his little potash bottle handy."

"Yes, that's so," remarked Giraffe, "there are some people who don't know the difference between a poisonous rattler, with its square head, and a long twisting black snake."

Step Hen turned a little red in the face, and laughed; but did not venture to take up Giraffe's dare, so that for once an argument that might have waxed fierce was avoided.

Presently they were moving on again. Acting on the suggestion of Thad the four scouts had formed a sort of fan formation, being within easy seeing and hearing distance of each other, but covering quite a wide stretch of ground.

Allan and Thad had given it as their opinion, although they admitted they could not be absolutely sure, that although they must certainly have cov-

ered fully thirty miles in their wanderings, they were not more than ten from the camp by the rapids.

It fell to Giraffe to make a discovery this time. Along about two o'clock he raised his voice and gave an excited call. This being the signal to assemble, the other scouts hurried toward Giraffe, anxious to learn what he had to communicate.

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE TROUBLE AHEAD.

"WHAT have you?" asked Step Hen, who, strange to say, in spite of his lame leg, arrived just a little in advance of the other two.

Giraffe was standing there, twisting that long neck of his this way and that. He declined to say anything until Thad had arrived on the scene. Then, with an expressive pose, he pointed to the ground near his feet.

"What d'ye call that, eh? Tell me I ain't got the eye of an eagle? Somebody else might have gone stumping along, and never seen it. But you can ketch a weasel asleep as easy as you can fool me."

"It's a trail, all right," said Thad.

"Say *his* trail," persisted Giraffe.

"Bumpus did make it, that's certain," Allan broke in with.

"And *after* the storm, too?

"No question about that, because the rain hasn't washed the marks at all," was the joyous declaration of Allan.

"See?" cried Giraffe.

If he had been wearing a vest, Step Hen really believed the proud lengthy scout would have thrust his thumbs into the arm holes and assumed a pose, as though about to have his picture taken as a serious rival to Cooper's "Leatherstocking," the greatest of trail finders.

"What luck!" Step Hen broke out with.

"Luck nothing," flashed back Giraffe, refusing to be cheated out of any of his honors. "It's the reward of patient, plodding work, and using eyes and brain right along. Now, if I'd been satisfied to limp along, looking up at the sky, and all around, but never once on the ground, like some people I know do, d'ye suppose I'd ever run across this trail? Not much. Give Old Eagle Eye his due, Step Hen."

"Yes, he deserves it," said Thad, "because this is a most important find. It places us on top once more."

"Because now we've got something to work on," added Allan.

"Was this track made this morning?" asked Step Hen.

Allan shook his head.

"No," he replied, "I don't think so."

"But why shouldn't it be?" continued the other scout, bound to know.

"Why, you can see that the ground was still

quite wet when he passed along here. That wouldn't have been the case this morning, for in twelve hours or more it must have dried out pretty well," Allan explained.

"That's so; I never though of such an easy explanation," Step Hen admitted.

"Oh! there's a heap of things about this business we don't know," said Giraffe; "but it all sounds so mighty interesting I'm bound to learn right along."

They were following the new trail while exchanging remarks along this line.

"One good thing about it," Thad went on to say, "we now know Bumpus must have come through the storm all right."

"However did he do it?" murmured Giraffe, perplexed because the tenderfoot was proving such a wonder.

"Three to one he found a hollow tree and crawled in," grumbled Step Hen. "With the luck he's got, why of course lightning never struck there; while with me it was just sure to."

"Well," remarked Thad, "between you and me I don't believe Burpus would do that, because we were talking of lightning only the other day. He had an uncle who was killed that way when a tree was struck; and Bumpus said nobody would ever get him to take such chances. I remember his asking me if it would be all right to crawl in a hollow

log that lay flat on the ground, and I told him yes. So if he was able to find a log big enough to hold him, I guess that's what he did."

Giraffe gave a whistle. There was a little trace of envy in his manner, for Giraffe was a boy, and it did seem to him Bumpus was developing along the lines of a scout altogether too fast.

"I see your finish as patrol leader, Thad," he remarked. "That Bumpus has just waked up, and there's no telling what he'll do. I expect we'll all be kowtowing to him yet, like he was a real Chinese mandarin."

"Glad of it," laughed Thad. "And it would tickle me a lot, I tell you, if a few more scouts would take a notion to wake up."

"Well," returned Giraffe, "they may, yet. I know two that are digging knuckles into their eyes right at this minute, and stretchin' and yawnin' like they just meant to stir out of their dope sleep; eh, Step Hen?"

"That's so, Giraffe! Bumpus has set us the pace, I tell you," came the reply.

"What do you make of the trail, Allan?" the scoutmaster asked.

About this," replied the tracker. "Bumpus was leg-weary about this time. Plenty to show it. And I wouldn't be surprised if we came on his camp before long. I've seen where he stepped out

of his way, looking for dry wood, and then went on again, as if not satisfied."

"Hurrah for Bumpus! He's our pard;" exclaimed Step Hen, glad to even bask in the reflected light of so much glory.

"I wonder, now," Giraffe remarked, his thoughts naturally turning in the one direction," was he able to make a fire? Lots of fellers that like to call themselves scouts wouldn't know how, when every stick of wood was soaking wet after such a rain."

"Oh! they ain't all such fire cranks as you've always been, Giraffe," ventured Step Hen. "And I say it's good for the country they ain't. I reckon the whole wood supply of the United States would have been used up by now if the rest of the scouts had their minds set like you."

"But wait and see," said Thad. "I've got a notion that Bumpus is going to surprise some of us a lot more. Fact is, I believe he's just had his mind set on a hike like this for some time, because he's been asking dozens of questions of me, and setting the answers down in that little note-book of his, till he half filled it."

"Was one of them about makin' 'a fire after a rain?'" demanded Giraffe.

"Just that," replied Thad.

"You told him how to dig out the dry heart

from a stump or a log, to start his fire with, didn't you, Thad?"

"Explained it all fully," answered the patrol leader.

"Oh! if that's the case I just guess he will have made a fire It's easy, once you've been shown how," grumbled Giraffe.

"But you had to be told how, once, don't forget, Giraffe," Thad went on to say. "Be generous now, and remember that Bumpus has had his outdoor education sadly neglected. I'm glad he's showing new life, and I hope it will keep right along. I believe it will. That's the beauty of this scout business—once a boy gets a taste of these many things that call for self-reliance and thought, he keeps on wanting to know more. His appetite becomes enormous; but the food supply in the shape of information really has no limit, you understand."

"I'm going in for it with all my heart and soul, Thad," asserted Giraffe, more seriously than the patrol leader had known him to be for a long time.

"Me too," echoed Step Hen. "It's a good thing to know how to save a feller's life if he gets near drowned, cuts his foot with an ax, gets shot by accident, or else has the hard luck to run up against a mean rattler."

"And you can count on me to help you all I'm able to," said Thad. "There are a lot of things I don't know, myself. Allan, here, is teaching me a

heap about following a trail, and I'm enjoying it more than I can explain. Nothing like the practical experience, after all. The book-taught scout is all very well, but he had to change a lot of his ideas when he comes to see the same things really and truly done. And some of them are so different from his notion that he can hardly recognize 'em. What is it, Allan?"

This last was directed toward the tracker, who had suddenly shown evidences of excitement. They saw him bend down and more closely examine the ground in front.

Then he whistled, and turned a face toward his chums on which they could plainly read new anxiety.

"It beats anything how they could have just happened to cross the trail of Bumpus," he observed.

Thad instantly jumped at conclusions.

"Meaning our old acquaintances, Hank Dodge and Pierre Laporte?" he said.

"Here are their footprints as plain as anything," continued Allan. "Look for yourselves, because all of you know what they were like. Here's where Hank rested the butt of his gun on the ground, while he talked it over with Pierre; and yes, he even emptied his pipe right at this place, knocking it on his shoe, because you can see some half-burned tobacco in this footprint."

"Do you think they knew who Bumpus was?" asked Thad.

"They could guess, easy enough, after remembering what we said about our having a tenderfoot chum wandering around here by himself," was the prompt reply of the trail finder.

"But then, it wasn't any of their business," Giraffe went on to say. "They might have had curiosity enough to figure out who Bumpus was; but they'd never seen him, and so of course he hadn't done anything to injure them."

He looked troubled, though, even while thus trying to assure himself that Bumpus could not be in any peril because of these two ugly timber cruisers.

"But his chums had riled them up considerably," Allan went went on, "and perhaps they were mean enough to think they could hit us, through Bumpus,"

Step Hen ground his teeth in anger, while his eyes flashed ominously.

"Did they change their course right here, Allan?" he asked.

"Just what they did," was the reply.

"And followed after our chum?" Step Hen went on.

"You can see for yourself that their prints blot his out in places," the other replied.

"Come on!" said Step Hen, shaking his gun furiously.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STILL IN PURSUIT, WITH THE TRAIL GROWING WARMER.

STEP HEN was not alone in feeling angry at this action on the part of the two unscrupulous timber cruisers. Every one of the scouts experienced a degree of indignation that might easily be fanned into boyish rage.

"And I don't calculate, now," said Giraffe, presently, "that Hank and Pierre are the kind of men to step out of their way ten feet to do a good deed, 'specially toward a boy they'd never yet seen?"

"Well, they didn't impress me that way," declared Thad.

"And they haven't much of a reputation for being tenderhearted, I believe," Allan added, speaking over his shoulder, for he was following the trail persistently.

But then, even a novice could have kept on that trail. None of the three who made it seemed to think anything about hiding their tracks.

Those of Bumpus in particular were plainly

marked, and presently Giraffe began to notice this patent fact.

"There seems to be a big difference in these footprints," he said.

"There certainly is," Allan replied.

"Now, I don't mean it that way, because of course Bumpus hasn't got feet anywhere near as big as those of Hank and Pierre. But always it's the same, and his footprints look deeper than theirs. But for all he's so fat, sure Bumpus can't be heavier than either of those big broad shouldered husky men?"

Giraffe seemed to realize that there must be an explanation which would clear up this little mystery, and he wanted it.

"That isn't what makes the difference, Giraffe," the tracker went on. "You know, we decided that Bumpus went along here right soon after the storm yesterday afternoon, and while the ground was still soft?"

"Yes, I remember, Allan."

"Well," said Allan, "Hank and Pierre didn't happen on the scene until this morning, and by then the ground was somewhat firm again. Is that plain enough?"

"I should say it was, and thank you for the explanation," Giraffe answered. "It beats all what you fellers can get out of this thing. Why, that

alone is about as interesting a fact as anybody could think up."

"Then Bumpus had, say twelve hours the start?" suggested Step Hen.

"Right here, yes," replied Allan. "But you must remember that he was meaning to settle down for the night about this time. And when he went on this morning, perhaps they'd be only a couple of hours behind."

"Whew! things seem to be getting mighty interesting," remarked Giraffe.

"I should say they were," Step Hen asserted.

"Don't I wish Davy and Smithy and Bob White were here," the long scout went on.

"Huh! there's four of us as it is, and all carryin' good guns too. We ought to be enough of a crowd to hold up that pair of cowards," declared Step Hen, who did not seem to have a very high opinion of Hank and his mate.

"We did it once, all right," remarked Giraffe, with a grin, "and we c'n do it again, or my name is Dennis."

"But Bumpus hadn't camped yet, had he?" Step Hen asked.

"I think we're coming to where he spent last night," said Allan. "I had a glimpse just then of something that looked like a dead camp-fire. Yes, here it is, boys, you see."

"Well, he did do it, all right," muttered Giraffe,

as he stood there, and looked down upon the ashes of a fire.

"Yes," Thad remarked, "and here we can see where he obtained dry timber by hacking into the heart of this stump."

"Oh! Bumpus is the surprise of this trip, all right!" exclaimed Step Hen. "I'm just goin' to take off my hat to him, after what he's done."

"He seems to keep us guessing, don't he?" Thad remarked, looking around with a feeling akin to pride, to realize that the one who all along had been termed the real tenderfoot of the patrol, should so suddenly develop such astonishing skill in taking care of himself.

"No babes in the wood about this business, let me tell you," asserted Giraffe, after he had examined the way Bumpus had made his fire. "Done things pretty near as well as an old seasoned fire builder could have made out."

That was a high compliment indeed, coming from Giraffe. Bumpus must have felt greatly pleased, could he have heard it. Perhaps his right ear burned him just about that time, for all boys know that such a thing happens only when some one is making complimentary remarks about you.

"But Bumpus left here this morning, of course?" said Step Hen; and Allan went on:

"He did, after passing a pretty comfortable night on that bed of hemlock boughs which he made, and

which you can see there. Kept his feet toward the fire, too, just like an old experienced camper, who was without a tent and blanket would do. And his going off without this last is what convinces me Bumpus didn't really mean to lose himself when he started out to get his bear. He just took a lot of grub along, his hatchet, and plenty of ammunition, so as to be pretty well fixed in case he couldn't make use of his compass in finding the way back to camp."

Giraffe placed his hand on the dead ashes.

"Wet 'em down again, sure he did," he remarked.

"Ain't our chum just *it* though," chuckled Step Hen.

"He kept his fire burning all night," Thad remarked, casually.

"How d'ye know that?" asked Step Hen.

"Oh! the amount of ashes tells that he used a heap of wood," was the reply. "You can see he made his camp close to this fallen tree, and used his little ax in cutting up the dead branches."

"Bumpus deserves to be made a first-class scout," said Giraffe, in genuine enthusiasm.

"He's on the road there, anyhow," declared Allan.

"But we must be off," Thad remarked. "We've had a few minutes' rest while figuring out all these things our chum has been up to. Now let's put our best leg forward."

"That means the right one," said Giraffe.

"No, you're away off there; it's the left one," remonstrated Step Hen, limping more decidedly with his right leg to prove that it was not "in the running."

"Both of you are correct," declared Thad. "It all depends on the point of view you choose to take."

"And of course Hank and Company started out on the new trail, because I can see the marks of their brogans?" ventured Giraffe.

"Yes," Allan replied, "they looked around the camp a bit, perhaps surprised to find that even a tenderfoot scout knows how to take care of himself. Then they pushed on."

"How far behind Bumpus?"

"I should say about three hours," replied the trail master, without hesitation.

"He's got that much lead, then?" Giraffe asked.

"Close on it," Allan answered. "But something may cause him to stop, and then they'd overtake him. On the whole, I'd rather guess those men would make faster time than our chum."

"And be slowly but surely gaining, all the while?" suggested Thad.

"Yes."

"Then we've got to get a hustle on us, that's all," Giraffe asserted. "Already we're away behind in the race, and just as like as not another

night's going to catch us before we overhaul these parties. That'll make it bad."

"We can't help it any," remarked Thad, "we're doing our level best, and there's a limit, you know. We've just got to leave the rest to Providence."

"And Bumpus' luck—don't forget that," said Step Hen.

"He's sure got it along with him this trip," Giraffe avowed, "and it's been working over time for our fat chum too. Seems to me these here gents are kind of rash tryin' to meddle with a feller that has everything comin' to him like Bumpus has. P'raps they'll think they have made a mistake when they tackle that walkin' wonder."

Both Giraffe and Step Hen chuckled a little, as though the idea rather appealed to their boyish sense of humor. And Thad could not help thinking things had come to a strange pass indeed, when these two scouts, who had lorded it over Bumpus so long, on account of their superior knowledge, were ready to admit that they might yet sit at the feet of the fat chum, and take lessons in woodcraft.

Would wonders ever cease, Thad thought? But then, he knew only too well that once a scout becomes fully enthused with zeal in the pursuit of knowledge along these lines he will not only open up new pleasures daily for himself, but surprises for his friends as well.

They had been gone from the camp-fire about half an hour now. There was no trouble at all about following the trail; indeed, Allan more than once declared that even if a bandage were tied over his eyes he would have been able to keep right along, using his fingers to guide him, so plainly marked were the footprints of men and boy.

"Hello!" said Allan, suddenly, "I wonder now what started him to running?"

"Bumpus, you mean, don't you?" asked Giraffe.

"Yes, he began right here. You can see how his toes press down," Allan remarked.

"Perhaps he discovered the men behind him," suggested Step Hen.

"No, they were still more than two hours' back," Allan contrived, as he walked on hastily. "And besides, Bumpus never once turned to look behind; I could tell from his track if he did. Something in front must have attracted him."

Giraffe and Step Hen looked at each other.

"I wonder," said the former.

"'Twould be just Bumpus' luck if he did," the other boy exclaimed.

Neither of them spoke their thoughts aloud further than that. For a short time they kept moving rapidly along. And then Allan held up his hand as a signal for the others to stop.

"Well," he said, "it happened, after all these

days of tramping. Bumpus came across the trail of a bear, and a big fellow too. See here, you can see his tracks, where none of the others have marred them."

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER SHOCK.

"He was a buster, just as you said, Allan," Giraffe remarked, uneasily, after they had examined the imprint of those feet, showing the marks of the long cruel claws.

"A grizzly, I reckon?" Step Hen ventured.

"Yes. And I think he must have been hurt some, because he seemed to drag his left hind leg a little."

"P'raps Bumpus plugged him," Giraffe suggested, just as though he were speaking of some celebrated forest ranger, accustomed to meeting up with these terrors of the Rockies, rather than a fat scout who, up to recently, had been looked upon by most of his comrades as something of a joke.

"No, Bumpus was some distance away right here," Allan continued. "There is no sign of blood, so we know from that the injury was not a fresh one. And besides, whoever heard of a full-grown grizzly running away from a dozen human enemies, after being shot and wounded, much less from a single foe, and he a boy?"

"You're right, Allan," commented the scoutmaster.

"Reckon it does look that way," Giraffe admitted.

There was one good trait about the tall scout—no matter how strong an opinion he might have on any subject, once convinced of the error of his thinking, and Giraffe would own up to his mistake most cheerfully.

"So right here," Step Hen broke in, "Bumpus was on the run, achasin' fast after the limpin' grizzly? Say, Giraffe, he was in your class of cripples, because Allan says it was his *left* hind leg that was hurt."

"Well, I ain't got but one left leg so that makes all the difference," the tall scout hastened to announce.

"I wonder—" began Step Hen, and then paused, as though hardly daring to frame his thoughts in words.

"We're all doing that," remarked Allan.

"How did it end?" Thad remarked, straining his eyes to look ahead.

"Say, wouldn't it be just great now," Giraffe broke out with, "if we'd just come up with Bumpus asquattin' in the crotch of a tree, all his ammunition fired away, and that old bear sittin' on his haunches below, awaitin' for him to come down?"

"I'd just like to see it," said Step Hen, making a

suggestive gesture with his gun. "I'd try to drive a few dum-dum bullets into his hulking old carcase."

"But perhaps Bumpus mighn't be so smart about getting up in a tree, when a wounded bear was charging him," Giraffe ventured to remark.

All of them had a painful recollection of that other episode, when Bumpus, rashly discharged his ten-bore Marlin at the monster, and would have been caught trying to climb a tree, only for the help he received from one of his comrades.

"But Bumpus doesn't make the same mistake twice, I notice," said Thad, firmly; "and if he fired at *this* bear, I'm pretty sure he first of all had a tree picked out that he could climb, all right."

"I warrant you he did, Thad," Giraffe added.

They were all of them only too eager to believe the best. The very thought of Bumpus, after all the good work he had been doing, meeting such a dreadful fate as being torn to pieces by a bear, was something they tried to banish from their minds as incredible.

Nevertheless, in spite of all this outward display of confidence, they continued to cast eager glances ahead as they pushed on.

Giraffe about this time remembered that there were others also interested in the fate of the lone scout.

"I see Hank and Pierre are keepin' right along?" he remarked.

"Yes," replied Allan, thinking this was really a question.

"Mebbe they think a nice bear skin wouldn't be a bad article to have, even if it is the off season for furs," Giraffe added.

"More'n likely," Step Hen broke in with, "they reckon as how they'd better keep along, so as to bury what's left of our poor chum, and claim his rifle and other belongings as salvage."

"Let's hope then they'll meet up with the greatest disappointment of their lives," Thad hastened to remark, shivering at the cruel picture the words of Step Hen presented to his mind.

"Listen!"

They all came to a standstill when Giraffe called out. Every ear was strained in the attempt to catch a sound that might be a cry for help, or the distant report of a gun.

"Guess it must a been that old crow cawing himself hoarse over yonder on that tree," Giraffe finally admitted. "Thought it was somebody callin' us to halt, sure I did, Thad."

"Seems like you were mistaken," was all the scoutmaster remarked, as once again the march was resumed.

"P'raps he didn't overtake the old bear after all," Step Hen broke out with, a couple of minutes later.

"Well, he was following the trail, all right, when

he got here," Allan asserted, with a positive way that seemed convincing.

"But you said at first he saw the bear, when he took to running."

"I thought he did," replied the trail hunter, "but since then I've come to the conclusion I was wrong. Still, you can see that he kept on, for bear, Bumpus and the two men are written in the tracks as plain as print."

"Yes, that's so, Allan. But there don't seem to be any sign of life ahead. Here, what's the matter with you, Old Eagle Eye? Just look beyond, and see if you c'n discover our brave chum up a tree somewhere?"

Thus appealed to, and complimented rather than otherwise by the title which Step Hen had thrust upon him, Giraffe did stretch his long neck, and scan the region ahead.

"Don't see him a waiving to us, up in one of those trees?" the other asked.

"Nixy," returned the one with the keen vision, a shade of disappointment perceptible in his voice. "I c'n see heaps of trees, and p'raps there might be a boy sittin' up in one of the same; but if he's waving to us, I don't get on to his wave. But hold on!"

"Oh! then you *do* see something?" cried Step Hen, pulling back the hammer of his repeating rifle eagerly.

"Not in a tree," replied Giraffe, cautiously.

Something in his manner, perhaps in his paling face as well, gave Thad a nervous chill. As for himself, he had not discovered anything amiss; but perhaps his range of vision was more limited than that of the tall scout; or possibly he did not chance to be looking in the same direction.

"Where then?" asked Step Hen.

"Er—on the ground," replied the other, slowly and soberly.

"Is—do you think it's Bumpus?" demanded Step Hen, also losing his color.

"I don't know. There's a little bush in the way, and I can't see very well," Giraffe added.

"But—does it move any, Giraffe?" the horrified Step Hen asked.

"Don't seem to, one bit, all the time I've been keepin' my eye on the same."

"Oh! my stars."

Step Hen could not command his voice to say more. He kept staring in a general direction ahead, as though he could see what attracted the notice of the chum who had the telescopic eyes.

But Thad was not so easily satisfied.

"Show me where you mean, Giraffe," he said, grimly.

If there was any unpleasant duty to be performed Thad Brewster could be depended on to go about it without flinching. He would have made a fine

soldier, because discipline was so much a part of his nature.

"There, follow those three trees that run as straight a line as if some surveyor had a planted the same for range finders. D'ye see that light bunch of scrub just beyond? All right, look just to the left, and——"

"I see it!" said Thad, quietly.

A dozen seconds of dreadful suspense followed. Then Step Hen, who had managed to recover his lost breath, broke forth with:

"Is it Bumpus, Thad?"

"I don't believe so," replied the scoutmaster, steadily, and it could easily be seen that he must have just been under a terrible strain.

"What makes you say that; I'm asking for information, but all the same I'm awful glad to hear you make that remark," Giraffe observed.

"In the first place it doesn't seem to be the color of our chum's clothes," Thad began, "and then, on the other hand, it's certainly too big to be him."

"Guess you hit the nail on the head there, Thad," Giraffe hastened to declare; "now that I look closer, I reckon it is just too big."

"Mebbe it's only a rock after all, or an old stump," suggested Step Hen.

"Mebbe it is," replied the tall scout, meekly, for his feelings had been so recently torn by conflicting

hopes and fears, that he was in no mood for argument.

"Let's push forward and see," suggested Allan.

"Trail seems to lead that way, don't it?" Thad mentioned, when they had been moving along swiftly for a few minutes.

"Yes, and we'll soon know the worst, because, unless I'm much mistaken the *thing* is lying just at the other side of them bushes. They're thicker here, you see, and we won't be able to tell what it's doing till after we get around the same."

Giraffe had a habit of talking at a lively pace when wishing to keep his heart from betraying his nervousness. It was somewhat on the principle that a boy whistles as loud as he can when passing a country graveyard.

Half a minute later, and in a bunch the four scouts turned a flank movement around the bushes. Step Hen and Giraffe almost dropped with sheer astonishment, and had to actually sustain each other. No wonder, when before them they saw the motionless form of a huge bear, that had evidently been shot in a dozen places.

CHAPTER XX.

FINDING OUT HOW BUMPUS DID IT.

"WELL, what d'ye think of that?" Giraffe demanded, as, with his comrades, he presently hurried forward to examine the dead bear.

"I said Bumpus could do it, didn't I?" questioned Step Hen. "Why, with the great run of luck he's camping alongside now, that pard of ours could go into the lion and elephant country of Africa, and knock over more old tuskers and yellow manes than you could shake a stick at."

"But how d'ye you know he did this?" asked Giraffe, as a new doubt assailed him.

"Tell me who else could?" demanded the other.

"Oh! I'm not sayin' they did; don't think that," Giraffe went on; "but we happen to know there are a couple of men hanging around this section of the country."

"Meaning Hank and Pierre, of course?"

"Yes, they're the dodgers. Now, you see, they just might have come up here, found the bear holdin' Bumpus up in a tree, and took a notion to knock

the old mountain bear silly, just so they could look our chum over, and take all he had."

Step Hen was unable to hazard a reply to this, and so he appealed to those who ought to be able to decide.

"How about that, Thad, Allan?"

Both shook their heads in the negative.

"Give Bumpus all the credit of downing this bear," Thad remarked.

"There are lots of things that go to prove it," said Allan. "Look here, and I'll show you. See, here's where he knelt to fire, first of all, and I want you to notice what a dandy tree for climbing Bumpus picked out, just alongside."

"And when he'd rammed in both charges, only to see the bear coming full tilt after him, like a house afire, Bumpus swung up in the tree—is that it, Allan?" and Giraffe looked wise as he said this.

"Just what he did," Allan went on to say. "I reckon he had a stout cord fixed on his gun, and could slip one arm through this, so that the Marlin went up when he did, all right."

"Ain't he the cute one, though?" Step Hen murmured, in admiration.

"Well, you can see how the bear clawed the tree," continued Allan, "but he wasn't able to get up. Grizzlies are poor climbers anyway, and this

fellow must have been handicapped by that injured hind leg."

"And then Bumpus, he opened on him, didn't he?" Giraffe cried.

"Well, I guess that's what he did," laughed Thad. "I can count *twelve* empty shells here under the tree. Two Bumpus used at long range, but all the rest he must have fired point-blank, with the bear not more than five or ten feet away from the muzzle of his gun."

"How d'ye tell that?" asked Giraffe.

"Why, here, and here you can see the hair on the bear looks singed around a wound. That proves the gun was only a few feet away. And notice too, boys, nearly every shot took effect either in the breast or back of the bear. The one that finished him was this in the ear. It penetrated his brain."

Giraffe gave one of his whistles, and then remarked:

"Glory! but there must have been a hot time around here, all right. I can just imagine I see Bumpus perched up in that crotch, and blazing away as fast as he could load. What a circus it was, and such great luck. Why, that feller could grab the first prize in the Havana lottery if he ever wanted to go down to Cuba and take a chance. He can sure do anything!"

"He got his bear, bless his dear old heart," laughed Step Hen.

"Yes, and just like he did with the bob-cat; only this time, he hacked off the claws from all four feet. Must mean to have 'em made into a war necklace, Indian fashion," observed Allan.

"Looks some like a slaughter-house around here," Giraffe said. "The bear bled from every wound. They told us a grizzly could stand any amount of lead, and now I believe it. Why, at that close range, them buckshot in his gun just tore in like a great big fifty-eight slug. Oh! what a sight, if Davy had only been here with his snapshot box."

"But I can see that Hank and Pierre came right along in," observed Step Hen.

"Yes, and looked around, just like we're doing now," Allan remarked.

"I'm some surprised that they didn't capture the skin of the bear," the other went on. "Bumpus couldn't take it off, because that's one thing he hasn't learned—yet. But surely Hank or Pierre must be old trappers enough for that."

But Allan shook his head.

"They looked at it, and quickly decided it wasn't worth taking," he said. "First place, Bumpus had hacked all the fierce claws off, and they're the best part of a grizzly pelt, I'm told. Then our chum had, as you can see, just about riddled the hide; shot holes through every which way. That's prob-

ably why they didn't bother trying to take the skin off the bear."

"But—did they keep on after Bumpus?" asked Giraffe.

"I'm sorry to say they did," admitted Allan, who with his customary alertness had been looking around, and taking note of things.

"That means, we will be on the move again," Giraffe declared.

"Can't be getting away any too soon to suit me," Step Hen said.

"The things I'm sorry about are these," remarked Thad. "First, it's getting along in the afternoon now, and our chances of overtaking either the men or Bumpus before darkness comes on are mighty small, I'm afraid. You see they've got quite a few hours' advantage over us."

"Well, why not make a torch or so, and keep moving along, even after night does set in," suggested Giraffe, quickly, for his mind was always inclining toward fire in some shape or style.

"Now, that may not be such a bad idea at all, Giraffe," Thad promptly declared. "And I'm glad you mentioned it. If we're not too leg-weary after we've eaten, and rested an hour or two, we might try that scheme."

"If it didn't do anything else," put in Allan, "it would surely cut down the big lead they've got on us, and we might be close enough when we started

at dawn again, to get Bumpus with the call of the Silver Fox Patrol."

"Better than that, even," said Thad, "if we kept moving right along to-night who knows but what we might have the luck to glimpse a camp-fire. Remember how we did that before, and thought to surprise our chum; when it turned out the other way, and we got all the surprise from Hank and Pierre?"

"Whose fire would this be, d'ye think—Bumpus', or Hank's?" asked Giraffe.

"Perhaps both," was the significant reply Thad made. "For unless they've changed their minds, and concluded not to meddle with a tenderfoot scout who was able to kill a full grown grizzly all by himself, I take it that before now Bumpus and the timber cruisers have joined forces."

"Like the lion and the lamb lying down together without the least bit of trouble, because the lamb was *inside* the lion," remarked Giraffe, drily.

"Yes, the chances are that they've bulldozed our chum, and made him wait upon them like a slave, cook their meals for them; and perhaps they will tie him up in camp to-night, so he won't have a chance to run away."

Step Hen fairly gnashed his teeth while drawing this agonizing mental picture of the further troubles of Bumpus. And even those who had the most faith in the fat scout's newly aroused ability to think, and take care of himself, could hardly see

how the awkward lad might come out of such an encounter as this with any degree of credit.

Being up against two husky and unprincipled men, who had brains with which to plot and scheme, was an entirely different proposition from meeting animals that acted only from instinct, and often very unwisely.

"But see here, Thad," exclaimed Step Hen, "you said a while ago there were two reasons for you feeling sorry, and the first was that it was getting late, and we might have to camp soon. What was the other?"

"Why," the patrol leader continued; "knowing that these hard characters are abroad, between us and Bumpus, even if they haven't made a prisoner of our chum, you see, we're kept from doing any more shouting out loud."

"Just why?" asked the other, dubiously.

"It would only advertise our presence to the pair, and they could lay a trap to snare us. Perhaps they'd make Bumpus lure us on, or even imitate his voice and catch us napping. As it is now," Thad went on, "so far as we know, they don't even suspect that we're around. If we can keep them from knowing right along, our job's going to be all the easier."

"You're right, Thad," said Allan, emphatically.

And even the other two could see the force of his reasoning.

There was nothing to do, therefore, but keep steadily along, trusting to their perseverance to bring them a reward in the end. None of them dared to even dream that the astonishing good luck that had followed Bumpus ever since he found himself lost in the big timber, would not continue with him to the end.

The best they could figure on was that if their chum had fallen into the hands of the two husky timber spies, they would be tired enough to go into camp soon after, and make the boy do all the work of getting supper.

And while they thus dallied, dreaming of no danger, the four scouts might be advancing steadily, rod after rod, making use of a rude torch in order to see the trail, and all the while drawing nearer the crisis.

"You don't think they'd be apt to hurt Bumpus, do you, Thad?" the war-like Step Hen asked, for the third time, as they continued to press on.

"Not seriously," replied the scoutmaster. "We know they are bullies on the face of it, but really cowards at heart. If they hadn't been that, d'ye suppose for one minute they would ever have bombarded us while we slept, as they thought, with great rocks, any one of which might have broken our arms or legs? And if they've got hold of Bumpus, just because he's a scout, and our friend, they'd

likely kick him around a lot, and make him knuckle down to them; but I hardly believe they'd hurt him badly. But no matter what they do, they've got to settle with Bumpus' chums, sooner or later."

CHAPTER XXI.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

I'm glad, right glad to hear you say that, Thad," declared Step Hen.

"Yes, I know how you feel," the scoutmaster went on, "and it does you a lot of credit too, for scouts should stand by each other through thick and thin. But go slow, Step Hen, go slow. We don't want to do any shooting, if it can be avoided; and then, remember, only pepper their legs. We belong to an organization that stands for *peace* every time, and no scout can be permitted to do any violence, unless it is to actually save his own life, or that of a chum."

"Oh! I understand all that, Thad; make your mind easy," declared Step Hen, jauntily. "What I'd like to do in case those curs have kicked and pounded poor old Bumpus, would be to just give 'em each forty whacks on the bare back with that bull whip we use on Mike and Molly, our pack mules, when they get too stubborn for anything."

"Now, that ain't a bad idea, Step Hen," asserted

Giraffe, nodding his head until, perched on such a long neck, it reminded Thad of a wooden manikin he had seen working as an advertisement in a shop window where razors were sold. "No, it's a pretty good scheme—for you, Step Hen; but I can go you one better. We ought to just tar and feather such rascals, take their guns away, and ride 'em out of camp on a rail."

"The last part could be done easy enough," Step Hen declared; "but that other about the tar and feathers is too silly for anything."

"Why is it, I'd just like to know?" demanded Giraffe. "It's been done hundreds of times, down South, out West, and even up North."

"Sure, and I've no doubt it's a heap of satisfaction to them that apply the feathers. Something like the old fable 'fun for the boys, but death to the frogs.' But tell me, Giraffe, please where would you get the tar, up in this big timber wilderness? And how about the feathers—got a pillow handy you can rip open?" and Step Hen laughed in the face of the long scout, feeling that he had by far the best of the bargain.

"Oh, shucks! guess that did kinder slip my mind," grumbled Giraffe; and he felt so humiliated over his defeat in the wordy war that for five full minutes he actually remained as mute as the sphinx; and it generally took a good deal to keep Giraffe silent that long.

Of course they were constantly on the lookout for any signs ahead of those whose trail they followed. But they had very little hope of stumbling upon such a piece of good luck as overtaking them before night set in.

According to the latest report from Allan, in whom they all felt the utmost confidence, some hours had passed, perhaps four or more, since Hank and his French-Canadian partner had made those footprints.

"But they have been catching up on Bumpus right along," he had also announced in the same breath. "If they were two hours behind at the spot where the bear was killed, they've cut that down to one at the time they passed here. And going at the same rate of speed I should say they'd overtake our chum about a couple of miles away from this spot."

"Hope they made up their minds to camp right away then," said Giraffe. "I'm not saying anything, and I can keep on as long as the next one; but this right—left, which old leg is it, anyway—feels sore sometimes, and then numb-like."

"And I'm afraid mine's swelling just a little, Thad," ventured Step Hen. "P'raps there was some poison in that snake bite after all, and you didn't suck it all out."

"Don't worry," remarked the scoutmaster, cheerily. "Both of you are using your lame limb

more than you should, that's all. But that can't be helped, because we're bound to find our chum."

"Yes," said Giraffe, sturdily, "even if it takes a leg, as they say. But suppose, now, those men do come up with Bumpus, I reckon they'll make out to be friendly hunters, sent out by some of us to find him; because they know a lot about the scouts. Step Hen here jabbered like an old woman, when we believed Hank was the forest ranger, Toby Smathers, we'd been told to find."

"Not near so much as you did yourself, Giraffe," remonstrated Step Hen. "That's one thing I will admit you stand in a class by yourself—talking; yes, and in the making of fires at any old time and place. But of course they'll fool Bumpus that easy, he's so confiding, so free from suspicion himself."

"And then, before he knows what's happening, they'll switch his gun out of his hands, give him a few hard kicks, and just treat him like a dog. Oh! it fairly makes my blood boil just to think of it," Giraffe went on to say, while he frowned, and gnashed his teeth in a way that must have seriously alarmed the objects of his detestation, could they have been near enough to see and hear.

But unfortunately it was all wasted, for both Hank and Pierre were miles away at the time.

"What's that yonder?" exclaimed Thad, startling the others.

"Would you believe it, looks like an old stake

and rider country fence, left alone to go to the waste years ago?" Allan announced, after taking a look.

"Well, that's a sign we're getting near some village, I take it," declared Step Hen.

Giraffe laughed aloud when he heard this.

"Why, what a goose you are, Step Hen," he remarked, bluntly.

"Oh! am I? See any down coming along?" demanded the other, warmly.

"Sure I do—on your upper lip," Giraffe went on. "Noticed it only the other day; and thought then that if you keep on for a dozen years or so, we'll expect you to be sportin' as fine a moustache as the one old Jerry William has been coaxing along this half century. You know, the Cranford boys liken it to a baseball game, because there are nine on one side and nine on the other."

"But why was I silly when I said we might run across a village up here?" Step Hen persisted, being just bound to know.

"Because we were told that there wasn't such a thing within fifty miles of this same place, except the little settlement where we got our pack mules," the tall scout went on to say, convincingly.

"But that was a fence, all right," Step Hen avowed. "I heard Allan say so; and I guess I know a fence when I see one."

"Oh! well, don't talk of a fence now, Step Hen. I think if you ask Thad, he'll tell you some feller

must a tried to hold out up here, and gave it up from sheer loneliness. Either that, or else the Injuns got him."

"Injuns!" repeated Step Hen, apparently startled.

"Sure," Giraffe went on, for he was a great tease.

"How about that, Thad?" and the other scout turned to the patrol leader; because it had long ago become second nature with the members of the Silver Fox Patrol to put all arguments up to him for settlement; and it was really remarkable how satisfied both sides usually seemed with his decisions, since they had absolute faith in Thad as a just judge.

"Well, I rather expect Giraffe is yarning a little when he says the man may have been wiped out by the Indians," the scoutmaster replied, laughingly. "Fact is, the chances would be, some trappers come up here each season, and likely spent the whole winter reaping a harvest, returning in the Spring with their take. If we had time to look around, which we haven't, I reckon we'd stumble on a concealed cabin somewhere in the thickest of the timber."

"Wow! must be cold, all right, in winter. Talk about your zero, I guess the bottom drops out of the thermometer up here," Giraffe ventured to say.

"No doubt it is cold, because we're not a great

distance from the border line of the British Northwest provinces. But then, these fur takers expect that. The further north you go the better the fur," Thad remarked.

"That's a well-known fact," added Allan. "One trapper told me that the skin of a muskrat or a raccoon, taken away up in Canada, was worth three of the same captured down in Florida."

"Yes, I reckon that's so," said Giraffe, "I can understand why the fur is heavier and richer. Old Nature provides it according to the weather. If it's a country with hardly any winter, why the fur is thin; and just the other way where it's bitter cold for many months."

"But that fence?" Step Hen went on.

"Listen to him still harping on that fence business!" jeered Giraffe.

"Oh!" Thad went on to say, pleasantly," perhaps one year these trappers tried to stay through the summer too, and put up a fence to keep their horses from straying, and falling prey to the wild beasts."

Step Hen seemed satisfied, because the explanation appeared natural. So for a while they kept plodding on in almost complete silence.

Both lame boys limped more or less. Thad noticed this, and concluded that they deserved a rest, especially since the afternoon was creeping along, and already the timber began to look a little shadowy.

So he mentioned the fact to Allan, who immediately resolved to keep a bright lookout for a nice spring of cool water, alongside of which they might stop, build a little fire, and take things comfortable for a while.

Luckily this chanced to appear very shortly. Although they would not say as much, being too proud to complain, Step Hen and Giraffe were secretly glad of the chance to rest. They talked valorously, however, of what great stunts they would be ready to perform after they devoured some supper, and had taken things a little easy.

Thad knew, however, that it would really require something of an effort to get the boys started afresh. The two hours' rest would refresh their energies, but stiffen their sore legs, more or less.

Giraffe attended to the fire part of the business, as usual, and Step Hen hovered near by, ready to assist with what little cooking they might have to do. Thad sat there, examining some rough charts he had made of the country, as he knew it; and figuring on just where the camp by the rapids, occupied by Bob White, Davy Jones and Smithy, must be.

Allan had started to take a look around the vicinity, and it was hardly more than ten minutes when he was heard calling:

"Hello! Thad, come here, and give me a hand, will you? I'm caught fast in a trap!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CRIPPLE BUSINESS SEEMS TO BE CONTAGIOUS.

Of course these words from their comrade gave the other three Boy Scouts quite a shock. Giraffe was on his knees by the fire, and he immediately started to crane his neck, twisting his head in every direction. Step Hen very wisely first of all removed the little extra coffee-pot they had brought along, and set it safely on the ground, before scrambling to his feet.

Thad was already hurrying off. Not knowing what Allan meant by being in a "trap" the sagacious scoutmaster made sure to carry his gun along with him. And seeing this, the other two did likewise. In that wonderful country so close to the mountains, there was no telling what sudden necessity might arise for a means of defense.

"Where are you, Allan?" called Thad.

The woods were partly in darkness. It was possible to see the tree trunks, but all else seemed vague. This, of course, was partly caused by the fact of the boys having had their eyes dazzled by the glow-

ing fire. Had they stood there for ten minutes, until used to the semi-gloom, doubtless they could have distinguished objects around them much more readily.

"This way!" came in Allan's voice, and rather close by. "No great hurry, boys; but I've tried to get out myself, and can't turn around so as to reach the spring, and step on it with the other foot."

"Spring!" echoed Giraffe.

"Yes, because I'm held fast in the grip of an old rusty bear trap, that must have been left here last season by the trappers," said Allan.

"Well! what d'ye think about that?" exclaimed Giraffe.

They were now close to where Allan could be seen standing up.

"Are you hurt much, Allan?" demanded Thad, horrified at the idea of the other having a badly-mangled leg.

"Oh! it hurts some, but I guess the old trap must have a pretty weak set of springs, and that's why they purposely left it behind. But if it didn't get a bear, it caught me by the leg, all right."

"Which leg?" demanded Step Hen, quickly; but Thad spoke up before the question could be answered.

"Hadn't we better have some light here to work by, Allan?" he asked.

"I should say it wouldn't be a bad idea, because there are two springs, and they ought to be held down at the same time," the victim of the trap answered.

"How about it, Giraffe?" asked the patrol leader.

"Do you want a torch?" exclaimed the fire builder, eagerly. "Oh! just give me a minute or so, and I'll fix you out quick."

With that he whirled around in his tracks, and started to go back toward the fire, with great bounds, that would have done credit to a leaping deer. When those long "spindle" legs of Giraffe got to working properly, they were capable of covering ground at a tremendous rate. And if he had a few stitches of pain, because of that bad stone bruise, Giraffe paid little attention to it, so engrossed was he in carrying out the order to get a torch.

"I hope you're not hurt much, Allan?" said Thad, solicitously, as he reached the side of his chum, and began feeling for the trap with both hands.

"It isn't as comfortable as it might be," admitted the other, with a nervous little laugh," and I guess I'll have to join the ranks of the limpers for a few days; but then, think how much worse it might have been, Thad."

"You mean if the trap had been new instead of worn out, Allen?"

"Yes, that's it, with the springs good, and strong enough to hold even a big bear. Whew! I guess I'm some lucky at that. And then, if I didn't have a lot of splendid chums close at hand to help me, I might have a tough time getting out myself; because, you see, they staked the old trap down to the ground, and I just don't seem able to turn far enough to get at the second spring."

"I warrant you've been trying, all right," suggested Thad.

"You just bet I have," chuckled Allan, "for five minutes or so, turning and twisting. You see, I didn't want the rest of you to know how I'd stepped plumb into an old bear trap, hidden under the dead leaves here."

"But of course you couldn't make it?" Thad continued, watching Giraffe waving a blazing brand about his head to induce it to flame up better, as he left the fire, and started toward the others.

"Had to own up at last," admitted Allan, "because it hurt badly every time I tried to turn around. But now it will be all right; for here's Giraffe and his light."

"A good torch she is, too," declared the long scout, coming up just then; "burns just like that fat pine or light wood we had down in North

Carolina. My! what an immense trap. It must pinch that leg of yours some, Allan."

"Get around on that side, Step Hen," ordered Thad, "and be sure, once you stand on the spring, not to get off until I give the word; because if you did, it will close the jaws as quick as that, and perhaps do more damage."

"Reckon I understand, Thad," said Step Hen, starting to follow out directions.

"And you, Giraffe, hold the light so both of us can see," continued Thad. "There, steady now. All ready, Step Hen?"

"Sure."

"Then push down hard and steady. There she comes!"

Allan had taken hold of the jaws of the old bear trap, and no sooner did the pressure exerted by the two side springs cease, than he was able to push them wide apart.

He immediately snatched his leg out of the trap, and no sooner had he done so than he rolled over on the ground.

"Oh! my stars!" exclaimed Step Hen, "he's hurt more'n he knows of. What if he's got a broken leg? Wouldn't we be in a nice pickle though?"

"It isn't so bad as that, boys," said Allan, who was feeling of the calf of his leg as he lay on his back, "though it hurts quite some. But help

me up, Thad, and we'll get to the fire. By the time I've used my leg a little, and you get some of that magic liniment soaked on the spot, I guess I'll make out, and be able to start when the rest of you do."

Allan was full of pluck. Moreover, he was an unusually hardy boy, for he had always spent a good part of his time outdoors; and there is nothing more calculated to build up a lad's system than that.

He limped some, of course, as he headed toward the fire; but when Allan put those firm lips of his tightly together, nothing of an ordinary character at least, could force him to groan, or even admit that he suffered.

Once by the fire he sat down. Step Hen went on with his simple cooking operations, while Thad, assisted by the ready Giraffe, started to look at the hurt.

"Lucky I had on my leggings," remarked Allan. "With those, and my trouser leg underneath, it made more or less of a bumper. And then again, you know, traps are never made with teeth nowadays, like they used to be. A man told me they found that the old style lacerated the leg of the animal so much, they used to lose a third of their catch; for the fox or the mink or the otter would either pull and squirm till he'd amputated his leg, or else gnaw it off."

"Gnaw it off—ain't you romancing, now, Allan?" asked Giraffe.

"Not at all," replied the other. "Why that's often been done, though trappers are divided in their opinion about it. Some think the animal deliberately gnaws its leg off, ready to make the sacrifice for the sake of liberty. Others say that an animal naturally bites at anything that hurts it; and it's while snapping at the jaws of the trap they keep on tearing at their wounded and broken leg, till it gives way. Anyhow, there are always a number of poor three-legged small animals in the woods where trapping is done. I've seen a red fox that was minus a leg; and I tell you right now, the way he could get over ground was a caution."

While Allan was talking along in this fashion, doling out interesting information, he was rolling up the leg of his trousers, though Thad could see him wince a little as though it gave him pain to do so.

"Only a black and blue place on each side," Allan went on to say, as if surprised not to discover a worse looking wound. "Funny how that could hurt as much as it does."

"Here, let me put on the liniment, and then bind it up," remarked Thad. "You'll find it cooling; and I warrant it's going to help along a lot. These black and blue bruises are always mighty painful. That's where you got the blow, and the

blood's already settling there. This stuff will help to keep it moving, for there's witch hazel in it, and that, you know, is really the extract of hamamelis. How's that now?"

"Feels better, yes, fifty per cent better," declared Allan, as the amateur scout surgeon fastened the wet bandage snugly with a couple of safety pins, and started to draw down the leg of the other's trousers, so the outside covering of canvas legging could be replaced.

After this had all been done, Allan got up, and commenced to walk around.

"Sort of trying out myself, you know, boys," he remarked, laughingly, to hide any grimace of pain, his actions might be causing.

"How is it?" asked Thad, sympathetically.

"Better than I expected," the other replied. "Excuse me if I limp around some, boys, but I think it'll let the liniment work in better, to keep it warmed up. Oh! I've a lot to be thankful for, let me tell you. I'm not putting up any sort of kick."

"Well," remarked Thad, with a good-natured smile, "all I can say is, that you fellows are working the family doctor to the limit these days. What with stone bruises, snake bites, and getting caught in bear traps, I'm making a big hole in the stock of salve and liniment I fetched along. I suppose it's going to be my turn next. Perhaps you may

have to make a stretcher, and carry me back to camp with a broken leg, or something like "that."

"For goodness sake, I hope not," exclaimed Allan. "Just imagine the alarm of the other fellows when a procession of limpers came in sight, carrying another. And with our chum Bumpus an unknown quantity too."

"What if he got lamed up too; wouldn't that just be the limit?" chuckled Giraffe, who often saw humor where no one else did.

"Anyhow," spoke up Step Hen, still busy at the fire, and there was an air of satisfaction in his voice, Giraffe instanty noted, "Allan belongs in *my* class."

"How's that?" instantly demanded the jealous Giraffe.

"Well! Just use your eyes, and you won't need to ask so many foolish questions. Don't you see how he limps when he puts that old *right* leg down? Well, it was my right one that got the snake bite. Allan and me make up the right leg brigade. You'll just have to herd by yourself, Giraffe—anyhow till somebody else takes a notion to drop in the fire, or cut his toe with the wood axe. or somethin' like that."

Thad and Allan laughed at the comical way in which the peculiar condition of things was described by Step Hen.

"Well," said the scoutmaster, "let's hope that won't happen. Better Giraffe should stay in a class all by himself to the end of the chapter, than another fellow meet with a serious accident. We've got cripples enough."

"I guess this ends the run of hard luck," declared the Maine boy, still keeping up his movements, although perhaps unconsciously favoring the injured leg, as any one is apt to do under similar conditions.

"Why d'ye say that?" asked Giraffe.

"Oh! you know they always say accidents come in threes," Allan replied, cheerfully. "The women folks in our house used always to believe that, anyhow; and this makes three of us hobbling around. If we were at home now, perhaps we'd be wanting to use crutches; but up here in the woods we just grin and bear it like true scouts."

"Yes," Giraffe went on, "guess you're right about women folks believin' in a broken looking-glass standing for coming trouble, and all such things; though my dad used to say he had all the trouble settle on him in paying for a new mirror. But honest to goodness, fellers, I remember once when my maw, she chanced to drop some dishes, and busted two—what does she do but walks right over to the dresser, gets out a cracked tumbler she must a been keepin' for just such a time to come along; and I give you my word, I nearly took a

fit when she just deliberately smashed that down alongside the broken crockery, and I heard her say, says she: 'There! that makes *three* now!' just as if that ended it."

"Supper's ready," announced Step Hen, when the laughter induced by Giraffe's little story had subsided.

The coffee tasted just as good as ever. Besides, they had some venison, cooked in the hunter's primitive way, each piece having been pierced by a long splinter of wood, the other end being stuck in the ground, so that the meat was close enough to the red coals to cook without burning—too much.

Perhaps at home, with a white table-cloth, silver, cut glass, and all the ordinary "fixings" around them, some of those boys might have viewed the suspicious looks of those half-cooked pieces of meat with more or less hesitation. But appetite ruled here, and every one declared it was "just prime." And if a fellow found that his meat, while scorched on the outside, was nearly raw in the center, why, you know, all good cook's unite in saying game should always be juicy and underdone, rather than dry and overdone—Step Hen had read it in his mother's precious cook-book at home, and boldly said so.

When they were done eating they just lay around talking and resting. It was very comfortable, and neither Giraffe nor Step Hen felt in the least like

making any change. But they knew that after a while, when the determined scoutmaster thought they had rested long enough, he would give the order that must once more see them limping along the trail, a band of cripples.

Of course the talk was mostly about Bumpus, harmed. For, despite the faith Thad professed to and what chances they had of finding him unhave in the extraordinary good luck of the fat scout, there were times when even his stout heart became a prey to misgivings; and in his mind he saw poor Bumpus being badly treated by those two bullies, the timber cruisers.

Latterly Allan had been selecting several good pieces of wood calculated to burn well, and serve as torches.

When Thad finally gave the word, they prepared to depart. One of the splinters of wood, taken from a near-by tree that must have been riven by a bolt of lightning in the recent storm, was lighted. Then they saw that the camp-fire was carefully put out, after which Allan, bearing the torch, found the trail, and started off.

They kept this up for over an hour. Not one of them murmured, though no doubt their lame legs hurt considerably. But they remembered constantly that they were scouts; and that as such, their ability to stand pain was on trial.

It was the secret hope of every heart, however,

that very soon now they might discover signs calculated to tell them they were drawing near the end of their long pursuit of the lost tenderfoot.

The others were glad, therefore, when Old Eagle Eye, as Step Hen persisted in terming Giraffe, suddenly called a halt.

"I guess I've sighted a camp-fire ahead, fellers!" was what he declared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WAY BLOCKED.

"HURRAH!" exclaimed Step Hen, not in a shout, but cautious like, as became a scout when danger was near; still, he was thrilled by the information which this announcement from Giraffe contained.

If there was a fire beyond, the chances seemed pretty good that they would soon know the truth with regard to Bumpus. Of course they kept on hoping for the best; but almost anything would be preferable to this anxiety that had been gnawing so long at their hearts, it had nearly worn them out.

Allan thrust his burning torch into the ground, behind a neighboring tree, so that its light might no longer blind his eyes when he tried to see the fire Giraffe had discovered.

After all of them had been directed just where to look, by the exulting scout whose sharp vision had first located the far-off light, it was easily decided that there could be no doubt as to its being a fire.

And as the trail ran about that way, in a general direction, of course they were perfectly safe in be-

lieving that some, or all, of those they had been so persistently following, would be found alongside that fire.

The very thought gave them a delicious thrill. By another hour then, perhaps in even less time than that, they would likely know the worst. And if, as several of them secretly feared, those two ugly brutes of timber cruisers had dared lay so much as the weight of their heavy hands in anger on Bumpus, or ventured to kick him around as though he were a slave—well, something unpleasant was going to happen to them, that was positive.

"It's a fire, all right," announced Thad; and Giraffe breathed easier, for he had been entertaining a slight fear lest some of his laurels be snatched away.

"And all of a mile from here," Allan remarked. "I wonder however you discovered it, Giraffe, with all these big trees around. There must be just a little opening ahead, and you hit on that avenue."

"Oh!" said Giraffe, as if carelessly, though he was undoubtedly secretly pleased with such words of commendation from one who had had such long experience in the art of woodcraft as the Maine boy; "what's the good of having eyes unless you use 'em? That was just dead easy—for me, you know."

"Now, the question is, what do we want to do—what would seem to be our best course?" Thad went on to say.

"I calculate you are referring to the torch business?" Allan remarked.

"Yes, that's it," replied the scoutmaster, "we've got to decide right now whether to keep on using it for a while longer, or stamp on the same, and make our way ahead the best way possible."

"But why not keep on with the light?" asked Step Hen, who was wondering whether in the darkness he might not be so dreadfully unfortunate as to step on another of those "fighting snakes," and have his *left* leg put out of commission also, which would be a dreaful catastrophe indeed.

"Because there's always a chance one of those sharp timber cruisers would see it bobbin' along, and that would put them on their guard. We had one experience in that line, you know, fellers, when they heard us coming, and got all ready to receive us. I don't like ever to stamp out a fire, but if you say the word, Thad, out it goes."

"I think on the whole," remarked the patrol leader, it would be wiser for us to do it. Let's locate that fire by the stars, or any other old way. Now, you can douse the glim, Giraffe."

Accordingly the tall scout trampled on the partly-burned torch until the very last spark had been extinguished.

"Hated to do it, but orders is orders," Giraffe was heard to mutter.

"Listen to him, would you?" said Step Hen,

scornfully. "He feels that way about all the fires he makes, too; just hates to put 'em out. Makes me think of an old aunt I have. She raises chickens, but never has any to eat. Why, she says she might as soon eat a baby, as a hen she'd raised, and talked to, and made a pet of. Don't ketch me being so old-womanish and silly."

Now that they were in darkness, it would of course make their progress slower, since they had to reckon on all sorts of obstacles.

"One thing," said Allan, as they started out, "I think I can come back to this same place in the morning, if we should want to find it again."

"But what would we want to find it for?" Step Hen demanded.

"Oh! I don't believe we will; but it might happen, you see, that we'd have to take up the trail again from here," Allan explained.

"You mean in case we lost the fire, or didn't find Bumpus with those two rascals?" Giraffe asked.

"That's it," said the Maine boy.

"Well, how're you agoin' to find this place again?" Step Hen went on to inquire, "all coons look alike to me; and one part of this big timber strikes me as pretty much the same as the rest, 'specially when you see it at night time."

"You wait, and Allan, he'll tell you how," broke in Giraffe, confidently. He felt sure from the way Allan spoke that he knew what he was saying; and

after seeing how cleverly the Maine boy had stuck to the trail, when the marks were all Greek to himself and Step Hen, the tall scout had come to have a sincere admiration for Allan.

Besides, just then it happened that Giraffe was feeling pretty good. He had received a very high compliment from the acting scoutmaster, and that is usually a great victory for any ambitious scout.

Why, he almost forgot he was tired to death, and that his injured leg had been paining him furiously. Such an affect can mind have over matter.

"Oh!" said Allan, off-hand, and in no particular hurry to speak, because they all really needed a little breathing spell before going on, "it's generally dead easy to mark most any place in the timber, if only you use your eyes. There's nearly always some odd old stump of a tree standing around that you'd be apt to know again. Sometimes there happens to be a tree with a queer shape, that just catches your eye. Once noticed, it's easy to remember the same."

"And right now you're meaning that pair of trees that have fallen toward each other till they look like a couple of girls going to hug," spoke up Giraffe, quickly; eager to show that those boasted eagle eyes of his had been able to see more than just the campfire far ahead.

"Sure thing, Giraffe, and I'm glad you noticed them, because two heads are better than one, any day," Allan went on to say.

"Even if one is—but I won't say it," Step Hen chuckled.

"Guess you better not," snapped Giraffe. "But now that we've decided on that little tree test of memory, hadn't we better be going ahead? I'm thinkin' of our poor chum Bumpus, and what he may be enduring right now."

"Yes," declared Thad," "we've rested enough, and might just as well be putting our best foot forward."

"Meanin' the right leg," muttered Giraffe.

"You're wrong—it's the left one with Allan and me, and majority rules in our patrol, you know," chuckled Step Hen.

"Come on, boys, I've got the bearings pretty well, if that star only stays out from behind the clouds that hide the moon."

Thad, upon speaking in this strain, started, with Allan alongside to give council, and insure progress along direct lines.

Having had much more experience than the other pair of scouts they were not only able to keep in a fairly direct line with the fire, but managed to avoid stumbling over obstacles as well.

Giraffe and Step Hen proved less fortunate. Several times they stepped into holes, or else tripped over vines. And each mishap was accompanied by more or less of a crash, as well as much grumbling

from the unfortunate one, and perhaps chuckling from the other..

This would never do in the wide world. Either they must slow up still more, so as to give the stumblers a chance to pick their way more carefully, or else those better able to move along without trouble would have to take Giraffe and Step Hen in tow.

It was decided that the latter method would be better, all things considered. And so Thad convoyed Giraffe, while Allan slipped a hand through the right arm of Step Hen.

"Case of the blind leading the blind, I guess," muttered the latter, grimly, "because we've both got a game right leg."

"Don't talk any more than you have to, Step Hen," cautioned the other.

So they moved aong for some time. At any rate it seemed to go better now. The stumbles were fewer, and of less consequence, and naturally, as the two who lacked experience in this sort of thing, became more and more proficient, their confidence arose accordingly.

Now and then they were able to discover the beacon light that was drawing them along. And in this particular the really sharp eyes of Giraffe proved of great help. Several times he was able to direct Thad's attention to the light when even the scoutmaster had failed to discover it.

But all this while their progress seemed to con-

tinue in such a direct forward line that both Giraffe and Step Hen were amazed. They could not understand how it was done, with all those trees, and other obstacles, to avoid.

Some boys seem to be natural-born woodsmen. It comes easy to such to adapt themselves to circumstances, and learn all sorts of new " wrinkles " connected with woodcraft. With others it is a hard task, though determination to succeed is the main thing. Before that will-power, few obstacles can stand.

It was while the four scouts were making fair progress through the timber in this manner, that they suddenly ran up against another serious obstacle, and one that for a time threatened to upset all their calculations.

Allan suddenly gave the low bark of a fox, quickly repeated twice. It brought the boys to a sudden standstill, for they recognized the signal of danger.

The way was blocked!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE "LITTLE LIGHTNING."

"WHAT is it?" whispered Step Hen, suddenly turning cold with apprehension.

No doubt the first thought that flashed through his mind was that those two unscrupulous timber cruisers must in some remarkable manner have learned of their coming again, as on the previous occasion.

Perhaps Step Hen had just been thinking along these lines, and was prepared to hear a gruff voice call out to them that it was no use, and that they had better surrender.

"The way is blocked!" said Allan, also in a low, guarded voice, as the others crowded in toward him.

"In what way, Allan?" asked Thad, anxiously, his voice hardly louder than the soft murmuring night wind that gently shivered the leaves overhead.

"Look straight ahead," replied the other. "It's good I happened to glimpse the fellow before we bumped into him."

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Step Hen.

He had of course done as Allan suggested, and to his surprise discovered two glow worms, or fire flies, or something similar, only they did not seem to come and go, but just burned steadily.

"What are they?" asked Giraffe, excitedly.

"Eyes," replied Allan.

"A wolf?" whispered Step Hen, apprehensively.

"More likely a panther," Thad answered back.

They were all half crouching there, with nervous hands clutching their guns.

"That's what it is," said Allan, with decision in his voice and manner. "A wolf would be too much of a coward to stay so long. And listen closely, boys."

"Wow! I can hear the old cat growling to himself," said Giraffe.

Thad felt his comrade make a hasty little move. Then his quick ear caught the click of a gun lock.

"Here, none of that, Giraffe," he whispered, sternly.

"But he might jump on us!" expostulated the tall scout.

"How about that, Allan?" asked the patrol leader, who did not like the idea of such a happening any more than Giraffe.

"I don't think he will, if we keep back," replied Allan, coolly; "that is, if I know anything about the nature of the beasts; and I ought to. He ob-

jects to our being in his game preserves, that's all, and is trying to serve notice on us the best he knows how, that he's cleared the decks for action, and means to fight, unless we turn around and quit."

"The nerve of the thing!" muttered Giraffe, weakly.

"How about going around, and letting the old thing alone?" suggested Step Hen.

"Oh! you'd find him on to that game," Allan went on to say. "Chances are he'd just keep pace with us; and when we started to advance again, we'd see his yellow eyes, and hear his warning growl."

"Shucks! and do we have to take water from a painter?" demanded Giraffe, giving the dangerous animal the name by which it is generally known among all backwoodsmen and forest rangers.

"I say let's knock him over. Every one draw a bead on those yellow eyes, and Thad give the word to fire. We'll pepper him so well he never can know what hit him."

It was Step Hen who made this war-like proposal; but Thad cautioned his comrades against any such rash action.

"Of course," he said, "we'd be pretty sure to kill the beast. He couldn't stand for such a volley at short range. But you understand, such a fierce

racket would tell everbody inside of five miles that we were around."

"Sure!" exclaimed Step Hen, quite crushed. "I forgot those thieves of timber men."

"But what can we do, then, Thad;" pleaded Giraffe, at his wits' ends to grapple with the perplexing problem.

As usual it was Thad who saw a way out.

"We've just got to scare him off," he said, in a resolute tone.

"But how can we, when we dassn't shout even, for fear of telling the fellers around that camp-fire all about us?" Step Hen asked.

"There may be a way," Thad said, quietly, just as though he might be running things over in that clever mind of his, and trying to decide whether it would pay to try the plan he had in view.

"Tell us?" urged Giraffe.

"Then listen, and if any of you think it's too risky, just say so, and we'll try something else."

When Thad said this, the others imagined he was about to propose an advance on the enemy from all sides. Confused by having four enemies approaching from as many quarters, perhaps the panther might think discretion the better part of valor, and turn tail and run.

So Giraffe and Step Hen drew in long breaths, and shut their teeth together in a firm, determined

way; doubtless resolving to do their duty, as scouts always should, no matter what the risk.

But they were very much surprised when Thad's explanation turned out to be something of an entirely different nature.

"Just by chance," he went on to say, while all of them kept watching those glowing balls of yellow fire so close by, "I've got with me one of those new patent little flashlights Davy has been using to take pictures with at night time. All you have to do is to hold it out, and pull the thing off. If that suddenly dazzled the eyes of the panther, I've got a good notion he'd move along. How about it, Allan?"

"I guess you're right, Thad," chuckled the Maine boy. "All the cat tribe seem to be dreadfully afraid of fire. Yes, that would sure fetch him."

Neither Giraffe nor Step Hen gave utterance to a single word, one way or the other. They were, as the former would have expressed it, "just tickled to death" by this bright suggestion on the part of the scout leader. And doubtless neither scout ever would believe, deep down in his admiring heart, that Thad simply "chanced" to have the explosive cartridge in his possession. Rather were they positive that he must have foreseen this very difficulty, and prepared for it.

"The only trouble is this," Thad continued, even while he handed his gun over to Step Hen, and

seemed to be fumbling with both hands, as though getting the little new-fangled flashlight cartridge in readiness for action; "do you think the sudden illumination will be seen at the camp yonder; and if so what do you expect Hank and Pierre will believe?"

"Oh! it will be seen, all right," remarked Giraffe.

"Sure thing," put in Step Hen, as though he felt it his duty to give his opinion with the rest, just to show that he grasped the situation; "because those things make a fierce flare-up."

"But you ought to use it, all the same, Thad," remarked Allan. "If the men notice it at all, the chances are ten to one they'll think it was only some little lightning. Since that storm anything goes, you know."

"Little lightning it is, then," returned the scoutmaster.

"The rest of us had better hold ourselves ready to shoot, if the beast jumps this way instead of the other," Allan suggested.

"You bet we will," said Giraffe.

"Every time," whispered Step Hen, gently lowering Thad's gun to the ground, so he could handle his own better.

Now, Thad knew how both of them were apt to be impulsive, and he thought it best to warn them against precipitate action.

"Careful, boys. The chances are, you won't have

to shoot. Use good judgment, and don't spoil things. Keep your eyes on that spot. Are you ready?"

"Yes," said Allan.

"Go ahead, Thad!" whispered Giraffe.

"Go on!" muttered Sep Hen, partly holding his breath with suspense.

"All right. Here she goes!"

Hardly had Thad spoken these words than there was a dazzling flash. He had been wise enough to hold the little cartridge pistol out at right angles, so that the fierce white glare might not blind them, as he hoped it would do in connection with the panther.

All of the boys were eagerly on the watch; and knowing just where to look they instantly sighted the panther. The abrupt and terrific burst of intense light had produced an effect upon the startled beast, just as Thad and Allan had so confidently predicted.

The boys saw a long, lithe, gray body leap wildly into the air. This was the beast that had just been disputing their right to advance further into his domain.

Evidently the cautious nature of the panther, together with his well-known fear of fire, had combined to give him a shock; for when he made that spasmodic leap into the air, it was *away* from the "little lightning," and not toward it.

For a second or two only did that brilliant

illumination continue. Then darkness once more swallowed up the surroundings; and doubtless it was all the more dense to the eyes of the four boys because of that recent dazzling flash.

They could hear a patter of feline feet among the dead leaves; but the sounds were retreating. There also came a low whimper. Allan told them later that a panther always gives utterance to such a complaining sound when he has been whipped in a fight, and made to slink off; or else frightened in any way.

"He's gone!" said Allan, reassuringly.

"And the chances are, he won't dare to block our path again in a hurry," Thad declared.

"Say, that old painter must a got a shock, though," Giraffe went on. "It was enough to scare anything that walks on four legs, or even two. Fact is, if I hadn't been looking for it, the giddy old thing would a given me a start."

"Same here," admitted Step Hen.

"Now that the way's clear, let's go on, boys," remarked Thad, as he took his gun again from Step Hen; "and we'll hope all our troubles can be chased away as easy as that."

CHAPTER XXV.

"CATCHING A TARTAR;" AND A FAT ONE AT THAT.

THEY had little trouble moving along now.

Somehow, it seemed as though the eyes of Step Hen and Giraffe must be getting more accustomed to the way obstacles could be avoided; or else the woods had become a little more open. At any rate they stumbled not at all now, which would seem to be a lucky thing, because all the while they were constantly drawing closer to the fire.

Thad and Allan knew they had need of caution. Those two precious rogues of timber spies were roaming this region with the intention of locating patches of valuable trees near enough to a stream to be felled, and floated down by the next Spring freshet. They were on Government land, and their rich but unscrupulous employers had been long engaged in this form of robbery, by which the reservations lose many millions of feet of fine lumber every year.

And such men, knowing that their work is evil, and that they are constantly breaking the law, sus-

pect every stranger of being a Government spy. No wonder then they showed dislike at the mere mention of the name of Toby Smathers, who was a forest ranger, at times in the employ of the Washington authorities, and always on the lookout for the operations of timber thieves.

Thad could see some one moving about. This happened when the other chanced to come between himself and the fire.

"I do believe that's our chum, Bumpus;" whispered Giraffe, eagerly, showing that he too had been watching the figure.

They all used their eyes to advantage, as they cautiously crept along. Presently they would have gained a point so near the fire that it would be necessary for them to change their mode of locomotion. Instead of walking, even as they were doing now, in a bent-over attitude, they must get down on all fours, and creep, just as a panther would do when approaching a feeding deer which he hoped to pounce upon unawares.

It was one of the most exciting and thrilling moments in the lives of Step Hen and Giraffe. Possibly they could not conceive of anything more typical of what must go hand in hand with scouting business, than this creeping through the woods, and constantly drawing closer and closer to a fire, about which enemies would most likely be seated, all unaware of their presence.

They felt proud of the manner in which they were accomplishing these things. It reflected great credit upon their ability as scouts.

Nearer they crawled.

Why, Allan was actually down on his stomach now, and he seemed to " wiggle " along just as they had seen an angle worm do, or a snake. Yes, and there was Thad copying the example of the expert Maine boy.

It would seem to be up to Giraffe and Step Hen to do likewise. They were quick to learn, once they had a pattern to go by. And in another minute the whole four of the scouts lay fully extended on the ground, clawing their way along as best they might; satisfied to advance, even though it be inches at a time.

There was no longer any doubt in connection with what might be going on just beyond. Even Giraffe and Step Hen understood it now.

First of all they saw the lost tenderfoot; and it did then great good just to feast their eyes upon the portly figure of Bumpus, after all this searching for him, day after day.

Then there were Hank and Pierre, too, just as hulking, and ugly as ever, or even more so.

The two timber cruisers were evidently taking their ease, stretched out at full length, smoking their pipes. Something about the very air of the men would have told an observer that they were enjoy-

ing the novelty of being waited on. It was not often that Hank and Pierre knew the luxury of having a "slave" along, to humor their every little whim; and they were apparently bent on making the most out of the opportunity.

Evidently Bumpus was aware of the fact that he might look upon himself as a servant, for the time being. His dejected manner, as he sat there, gnawing at some bones they had evidently allowed him to have, after he had cooked supper, and waited on his captors, seemed to tell this only too plainly.

Even as the four scouts lay there and looked, they heard Hank call out gruffly:

"Come here, younker!"

Bumpus pretended not to hear at first. Evidently he dreaded to get too close to the men, for some reason or other.

At that Hank burst out into a string of profanity that was enough to make any respectable scout shudder. And when he ordered Bumpus again to come over to him, the fat boy evidently dared no longer pretend deafness.

He approached the spot where the two men half sat; and Thad could see from the wary manner in which Bumpus did this that he expected rough treatment.

"Git me a coal outen the fire, you fat fool; my pipe's gone out again!"

Hank said this in the ugliest way possible.

Indeed, to judge from his manner, one might even imagine it was the fault of poor Bumpus that his pipe had ceased to burn, instead of his own laziness.

Bumpus forthwith stepped over to the near-by fire. As he bent over, he looked cautiously behind him once or twice, just as though the poor fellow half expected to have one of his tormentors kick him, and he did not want to have such a thing happen so that he would plunge in among the burning wood.

Securing a brand that was suitable for the purpose, Bumpus advanced toward the two men. He handed this to Hank.

"Stand thar!" ordered the bully, as Bumpus was edging away.

Applying the light to his pipe, Hank sent out several puffs of smoke. Then, just as a smoker might wish to extinguish his match before throwing it away, he suddenly hurled the blazing torch after the now retreating Bumpus. That worthy tried to dodge, but was either too clumsy, or else Hank had made allowances for this. At any rate, the brand struck Bumpus squarely in the middle of his fat back; and while it did not set his clothes on fire, at least it forced a grunt from the scout.

Hank burst out into a harsh laugh, while Pierre grinned. Then they went on talking as though regardless of the presence of the boy.

Thad had felt Giraffe quiver beside him when he saw Bumpus abused and insulted in this fashion.

And only for Hank giving that laugh, one of the men might have heard the gritting of Giraffe's strong teeth, he was that worked up.

"'Sh!" hissed the scoutmaster, close to the other's ear; and Giraffe subsided, though he was still quivering all over from excitement and eagerness,—yes and anger too. If he could only have had his way right then and there, Giraffe undoubtedly would have stepped out, and covering the two rascals with his gun, threatened to shoot unless they abjectly surrendered. And this time they would not get off as easily as before. After the way they had treated Bumpus, they deserved something more severe.

But then Thad evidently was not quite ready to act. Perhaps he wanted to see what else Hank and his timber mate might do. Perhaps—but Giraffe concluded that it was foolish trying to figure these things out, when all he had to do in order to learn the truth, was to possess his soul in patience and wait.

Bumpus, true to his new scout training, even while he was listening to the laughter of his tormentor, and rubbing his back where the fire-brand had struck him with such a thump; turned, and deliberately put his foot upon the blaze, grinding it into the earth until it was utterly extinguished.

It was really one of the most surprising examples of newly-acquired discipline that Thad had even seen. Nor would he soon forget it.

Bumpus was apparently watching the two men on the sly. When he thought they were not looking, the fat scout quickly bent over near a tree.

Thad had quite a thrill, for he saw that the two guns owned by the men stood against this same tree. Whatever could Bumpus be doing there? Again and again did he turn his head to glance toward Hank and Pierre, just as though he might be afraid that one of them could see him. But Hank was telling a story of some kind, evidently, for the rumble of his heavy voice seemed continuous; while Pierre lay on his back, both hands under his head, listening, and smoking in a lazy fashion.

Now Bumpus had quitted the vicinity of the tree, and hovered on the other side of the fire. He craned his neck several times, just as though he wanted to make sure of something.

Thad believed he knew what that *something* was. He had discovered, close alongside the burly figure of Hank, the ten-guaged, Marlin, double-barreled gun belonging to Bumpus. Evidently the bully had confiscated the weapon, and meant to keep it, as something that might come in handy.

Now, Bumpus was a poor loser. He had grown to feel quite attached to that remarkable gun, during the short period of his ownership. And doubt-

less it had become more precious in his sight, after the clever way in which it had worked of late, with regard to that wildcat; and later on the lame grizzily that had treed Bumpus.

Thad believed he had designs on that gun.

Just then Hank called out again.

"Git a kettle o' water at the spring, younker, an' bring me a drink! Be quick, now, er I'll skin ye alive!"

Bumpus picked up a kettle or saucepan, the only one in sight, and of generous proportions. As Hank roared at him to "dip deep, and bring her full, enough for a grown man," the fat scout hastened to do so.

He approached, holding the kettle with both hands. Hank half sat up, to receive it; which he certainly did, full in the face. As spluttering he started to get, first to his knees and then on his feet, Bumpus, with an agility that was remarkable in one of his stout build, snatched up his trusty Marlin from the ground, and hastened to put some little space between himself and the astonished timber cruisers, already jumping toward the tree where their guns stood.

"'Tain't no use!" shouted Bumpus, gleefully. "I took every cartridge out, and you bet I ain't agoin' to let you shove any more in. Sit down now, or I'll open fire on you!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"TENDERFOOT? WELL, HARDLY, AFTER THIS."

"Wow! bully for Bumpus!" cried out Giraffe.

"Hold 'em tight, old chum; we're here to see you through, all right!" shouted Step Hen.

Of course there was no use of trying to hide any longer. Thad and Allan knew this, and that the time had come for them to back Bumpus up, the minute they saw him open hostilities in that astonishing way.

All of them were on their feet, now, and hurrying toward the fire. Hank and Pierre, being desperate men, might have even thought it worth while to put up some sort of resistance; but they had their talons drawn when, upon investigating the condition of their guns, they found that, sure enough, these were empty.

While the two men lay there at their ease, never dreaming that the fat scout would have the nerve to do anything but whimper, and shiver at the sound of their harsh orders, Bumpus, laying out this wonderfully clever little surprise, had amused himself by

working the mechanism of their guns, and extracting the last cartridge. And it was the heavy rumble of Hank's deep bass voice that had helped operations along, by deadening the "click" of the cautiously moved mechanical devises belonging to the repeating rifles.

"Drop those guns, you two, and be quick about it!"

Thad gave this order, because he knew that each of the men would be apt to have a belt of extra cartridges buckled about their waists, or slung over their shoulder. And to an experienced hunter, it is only a question of seconds, really, when he can shove a single charge into the firing chamber of his empty gun.

Of course Hank and Pierre hated most dreadfully to obey this order; but there was no use talking; the scouts had the upper hand, and if they knew what was good for them they must do as they were told.

In the first place there was Bumpus, excitedly covering first one and then the other; and how were they to make sure but that he might, even by accident, have a cramp in his finger, while looking along the double-barreled Marlin?

Then, as if that were not enough, four other guns were bearing upon them, as the new arrivals advanced in a line.

"It's too big odds, younkers, an' we gives in;"

but Hank used a good many more words than this to express his disgust, only the rest were not at all necessary.

He threw his gun down angrily on the ground; Pierre was just as energetic, and both men fairly glared at their boyish captors.

"Step Hen, lay down your gun, and secure those of the enemy," ordered Thad.

With a wide grin decorating his freckled face, Step Hen proceeded to carry out the injunction of the patrol leader. And one could easily see that the boy took the keenest delight in thus having a hand in disarming the enemy.

"Now," continued Thad, "search Hank for a knife, and take it away. Get his cartridge belt too; and when you've done that, give Pierre a whirl. We'll just stand around, and be ready to plunk them chock full of lead if they try to resist."

But the men were utterly disheartened. They seemed to realize that they were up against a tough proposition. Everything was going wrong; and the philosophy of your timber cruiser under such conditions is to appear indifferent and reckless. Perhaps they try to act very much on the same principle as an Indian would, upon being put to the torture.

After fully disarming the men Thad saw to it that both of them were tied up. Hank growled fearfully, but the half-breed seemed to take the whole affair somewhat in the light of a good joke.

This seemed all the more strange because nearly all half-breeds, Thad had been told, were surly by nature.

When this duty had been well performed, Thad joined the others about the fire. Bumpus had had his hand shaken again and again until his whole arm began to feel the result.

"The bulliest feller in the whole bunch, barring none!" Step Hen had declared.

"He's on the way to being made a first-class scout, that's right," Giraffe solemnly remarked, all his petty jealousy gone, now that he again had hold of Bumpus' fat hand, and found himself looking into the laughing eyes.

"All along he's acquitted himself splendidly," said Thad, warmly.

"And none of us ever dreamed you had it in you, Bumpus," Allan chimed in.

It was indeed a proud hour for Bumpus. Forgotten were all his trials and anxieties. He would easily have been willing to undertake the whole programme again could he be sure of such a joyous outcome—yes, even to being hectored, browbeaten, insulted, and kicked about like a dog, by Hank and Pierre.

Long they sat there, talking of the many things that must of course be exceedingly interesting when looked back upon as past performances. Bumpus was asked strings of questions until finally he

threw up his hands, to announce that the well was pumped dry.

Then they set about making ready to pass the remainder of the night there. When another day came they could decide what to do with Hank and his companion, who were hardly the kind of men to set free, with arms on their person, and hatred in their hearts.

Of course Thad and Allan made up their minds that they must, between them, stand guard until morning came.

They dared not take any chances when dealing with such desperate men as were the two trapped timber cruisers. And when they saw that a vidette, armed with a ready gun, was to keep the fire going all the while, as well as watch them, doubtless the men decided not to try and escape, but take things as easy as possible.

There was no trouble.

Morning came, and found them up and doing; for Thad was most anxious to return to the camp near the foot of the rapids. After so many days he felt sure the three boys left at the camp would be dreadfully worried concerning the absent ones, and especially Bumpus; because, of course they still considered him as a poor, ignorant tenderfoot scout, blundering along after a fashion, and hardly knowing enough to come in out of the wet, when it rained.

Ah! yes, there were a number of tremendous sur-

prises in store for Dave and Bob and Smithy, when the full story of Bumpus' achievements was told by the glowing camp-fire; and mostly at that by those who had followed his trail through the big timber, reading the signs as they appeared, and observing the remarkable progress the fat member of the Silver Fox Patrol made, once he started thinking for himself.

They had enough venison left for one good meal all around, including the two timber cruisers. Thad was worried about these men. He did not know what to do with them, truth to tell.

If he sent them away with weapons and ammunition; there was always a chance that sometime later the fellows might again run across them, and give trouble.

On the other hand, it seemed rather cruel to turn them loose in the wilderness, so far away from civilization, and without arms, by means of which they might obtain food, or defend themselves in case of trouble.

Upon putting it up to Hank and Pierre themselves, the men, quite downcast now, declared that they were done "cruising" in that section, and meant to get out of it just as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Let us off this time, younker," Hank pleaded. "We got our lesson rubbed in good an' hard, I reckons. I'm even willin' to have Fatty here kick me

as many times as I did him; though I do say as how he paid it all up when he played that fine trick on us."

It was not surprising, therefore, that the gratified Bumpus, in the goodness of his heart, asked Thad to forgive the two men.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Thad decided. "Leave their guns here, and take the men to the camp with us. Then, if we decide to turn them loose, they'll have to come half a day's journey back to get the guns."

And so it was decided to arrange matters.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WELL-EARNED REST—CONCLUSION.

WELCOME indeed, was the sight of the two familiar tents, with a cheery camp-fire blazing in front; Mike and Molly, the two pack mules, browsing near by, and the three boys who had been left in charge caught in the act of cooking dinner.

It was just high noon on that day when Thad led his little victorious squad out of the brush, and in sight of the camp.

What an uproarious welcome awaited them! The three boys, who had begun to grow heavy hearted with suspense from long waiting and watching, vied with each other in trying to see who could make the most noise, and give the greatest assortment of yells intended to take the place of a welcome.

Why, even the astonished mules looked up and "hee-hawed to beat the band," as Giraffe declared. And when Bob White, Smithy and Davy Jones discovered that sure enough their comrades were fetching a pair of hulking prisoners along with them, their delight surpassed all bounds.

"It's getting to be a habit with us, fellers," declared Giraffe, proudly. "Why, we just can't take a little stroll any more, without bumping up against a pair of bad men, who need attention. Don't blame us; we just couldn't help it."

Bumpus, bless his dear old heart, was looking as "fine as a peach;" nothing at all like the woe-begone, half-starved tenderfoot, whom those left in the camp had expected to gaze upon, if indeed they were lucky enough to ever see him in the flesh once more.

With a beaming face he came along, his gun slung over his back by the heavy cord that had come in so handy when the grizzly chased him up a tree; and as he walked Bumpus had both hands up to his mouth, making sounds that would do credit to any horn. And behold, the burden of the air, as the shouting scouts recognized, was "Lo, the Conquering Hero Comes; Sound the Trumpets. Beat the Drums."

Such a great time as they had, shaking Bumpus by the hand, pounding him on the back, and telling him again and again how lucky he ought to consider himself because he had such good and loyal chums, ever ready to go out and succor the unfortunate, and bring them home again safely.

And Bumpus never once lifted up his voice in protestations or boastings, simply grinned through it all, and kept one eye on Thad; who finally thinking

it was time the fellows were made aware of the true state of affairs, called out:

"Show what you've got, Bumpus!"

"I imagine the great surprise, bordering on consternation, of Bob and Davy and Smithy when the fat tenderfoot fished in his pcket and held something up.

"The foot of a bob-cat, as sure as I live!" ejaculated Davy Jones.

"Did you kill it, Bumpus?" asked Smithy, awed by the very thought.

"Thad says so, and *he* knows!" was what Bumpus remarked; and then with even a wider grin he fished down in another pocket, this time holding up some bulky articles that made the three camp guardians fairly gasp for breath.

"Grizzly bear claws! Great Jehosophat! you don't mean to say that you found your bear, Bumpus, and actually bagged him?" cried Davy Jones.

"Did I, Thad; you saw where I left him?" replied the Wonderful One.

"You sure nailed him, good and hard, Bumpus, even if it did take ten shots or more, fired into him from a tree, to do the business. If ever anybody has a right to say he killed a bear all by himself, fair and square, Bumpus has. And here are three more truthful witnesses who will testify the same way," with which Thad waved his arm around to take in Step Hen, Allan and Giraffe, all of whom put up a

right hand, and gravely nodded approval of his words.

"And even that ain't all, fellers," quoth Giraffe, "what would you think now if I told you Bumpus had turned the tables on these here two critters who'd captured him, and were makin' him do all sorts of slave stunts to please themselves? Yes-siree, took all the shells out of their guns, and then grabbed up his own to cover 'em. We *saw* him do it all, so there ain't any mistake. If you doubt me, ask Hank there."

Mechanically the doubting ones turned toward the big timber cruiser, who, playing his little game of appearing to be very contrite and sorry, so as to be let off easily, made a wry face, and remarked:

"Jest what Fatty did ter us; he give us the biggest s'prise of our lives, Pierre and me. That's the time we fooled ourselves. He caught us, all right, and I ain't got no kick acomin', 'less so be he wants to pay me back that way; which I don't think's goin' to be the case, 'cause he's too fine a feller to be revengeful like."

"I want to shake hands with you again, suh," said Bob White, the Southern boy, as he pushed up to Bumpus. "And right now let me take back everything I've ever said about your being a poor tenderfoot. I reckon, suh, a heap of the rest of us scouts'll have to sit at your feet, and take a few lessons on *how to do it.*"

"A wild cat; a bear; and capturing a couple of—what are they, Thad, pirates, or just plain hold-up men? That's going some for even a first-class scout. Just as Bob says, we take off our hats to you, Chum Bumpus, and now, while dinner is cooking, just gather around the fire and tell us the whole blooming story," saying which Davy led the returned hero of the occasion to the seat of honor.

The story was all told over again, both during the eating of the meal, and afterwards. In fact it took almost two hours to get most of the facts out.

Then they concluded to hold the prisoners until the next morning, when they would be breaking camp, to head into the valleys of the Rocky Mountains, the tops of which reared themselves in great granite masses against the western sky.

"We'll probably have a good enough time the rest of our vacation out here," said Giraffe, later on, "but you can be sure we'll never again see such a string of exciting adventures as fell to our lot, and that of Bumpus, when he was hunting through the big timber for a bear; and the rest of us searching for a lost tenderfoot scout."

But Giraffe was really mistaken when he ventured to make this prophecy; for it was written that the members of the Silver Fox Patrol were to meet with still another series of mishaps and adventures before they left for home. What these were, and how cleverly Thad and his chums carried themselves

under trying conditions, will be found set down in the pages of the next volume in this Series, now ready under the title of "The Boy Scouts in the Rockies; or the Secret of the Hidden Silver Mine."

That very evening who should come along but Toby Smathers himself. He had been ranging through that section, really to find out what Hank Dodge and Pierre Laporte were doing; and seeing the camp had hastened to join the scouts feeling a longing for human company.

Thad liked the forest ranger right from the start, and was very much pleased when the other agreed to go with them as guide during the balance of the time they expected to spend in the Rockies—several weeks at least.

Toby Smathers gave the two men to understand that their every movement was being watched by agents of the aroused Government. The Interior Department was determined to put an end to timber stealing on a large scale by men who had grown enormously rich in the business.

Hank and Pierre professed to be alarmed; and when they went away in the morning to get their guns, which Thad had left ten miles off, they declared they were going to reform, and either go into the mines, or else emigrate to British Columbia.

"But," said Toby Smathers, "they ain't goin' to do it, mark me. Them critters are cut out for jail-

birds, and they'll either bring up thar, or else die with their boots on."

"Well, all I hope is," said Thad, as he gave Mike, the pack mule, a touch with the whip to start him moving, "that we never cross their trail again."

THE END.